

INTRODUCTION TO THE 1988 EDITION

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"Who's Ever Heard of Dr. Schreber?"

On 28 October 1884 elections to the German Reichstag were held. In the Saxon city of Chemnitz the candidate of the National Liberal Party suffered a crushing defeat. A local newspaper carried an article on this unsuccessful candidacy, headlined: "Who's ever heard of Dr. Schreber?"

For the hapless Doctor of Jurisprudence Daniel Paul Schreber, at the time Landgerichtsdirektor (chairman of the state court) in Chemnitz, the election returns marked the end of a political career even before it had started. The unsuccessful candidate sought to recover from the strains of the election campaign by taking the waters. But, again, the desired success never materialized: on 8 December 1884 the unknown Dr. Schreber was admitted to the Psychiatric Clinic at the University of Leipzig. There he remained for half a year before being discharged, apparently cured, at the beginning of June 1885, whereupon he resumed his work as a judge. His first and only attempt to establish himself in German politics had failed ingloriously, yet a different kind of "politics" and a different kind of glory was still in store for him.

Who's ever heard of Dr. Schreber? For the second son of the famous physician, orthopedist, and pedagogue Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Schreber, this was scarcely a pleasant question. His father—to this day revered by many as the inventor of the *Schrebergarten* (a small, private allotment garden within an urban area)—was in his time a leading proponent of German orthopedic gymnastics and was anything but unknown. His books numbered among the bestsellers of the nineteenth century; the most successful of his publications—*Medical Indoor Gymnastics; or, A System of Hygienic Exercises for Home Use To Be Practiced Anywhere without Apparatus or Assistance by Young and Old of*

Either Sex, for the Preservation of Health and General Activity—had reached by 1909 its thirty-second edition and a total of 205,000 copies printed. The *Biographical Lexicon of Outstanding Physicians of All Times and Peoples* (edited by Dr. August Hirsch) remarks that Dr. Schreiber's achievements in orthopedics and remedial gymnastics "contributed greatly to the development and popularization of active, so-called German remedial gymnastics, based on scientific physical training, in distinction to passive, so-called Swedish remedial gymnastics."¹ Because the titles of his works distinctly characterize the interests and endeavors of their author, several deserve to be mentioned, beginning with one which suggests that the family's political activism did not begin with Daniel Paul: *Physical Training from a Medical Standpoint, also a Matter of State*. Other books by the elder Schreiber include: *Detrimental Carriage and Habits of the Child, Callipædics or Rearing unto Beauty through the Natural and Uniform Promotion of Normal Bodily Development, Anthropos, the Structural Wonder of the Human Organism, The Panymnastikon; or, the Complete System of Gymnastics Using Only One Piece of Equipment, and—last but not least—The Family Friend as Educator and Conductor to Domestic Happiness, to Popular Health and to the Refinement of Man, for the Fathers and Mothers of the German People*.

Thus Dr. Schreiber senior was no simple orthopedist but rather a reformer filled with missionary zeal. The subtitle of one of his books expresses his goal most clearly: *A Doctrine of Happiness for the Physical Life of Man*. Not for a moment did he ever doubt that his efforts to raise the gymnastics movement to the level of a science would be of epoch-making significance for the German people. Accordingly, the *Panymnastikon* begins with the proclamation: "We salute German gymnastics as a sign of the revivification of the robust German popular spirit in a perfected and ennobled form corresponding to the level of general cultural development."²

This development, according to D. G. M. Schreiber, reaches its zenith in the gymnastics movement:

For centuries the vital German popular spirit wrestled in silent, open battle with the dark powers of medieval popery and Jesuitism, without ever permitting them to smother its vigor . . . Until 1618, and despite many earlier tests, this vigor managed to preserve itself in many essential aspects of spiritual and physical life . . . Of these beautiful blossoms of popular German national life, the monstrosity of the Thirty

Years' War destroyed nearly all traces . . . It took many, many years before the still glorious embers of the German popular spirit, mired deep in the ruins and ashes left behind, could again burst forth in individual flames. Yet even these various figures, the great spirits of a German nation now regenerating itself, were merely heralds of a better age which they, despite their valiant works, were never themselves to know. Two whole centuries were to pass before the era of rejuvenation could begin for the life of the German people and for its vital forces. Praise be to God! We, the generations now living, have entered this era, have crossed its threshold . . . Gymnastics is thus no passing fashion, but the young and ennobled instinct of the old but still healthy root of Germanic national life.³

"Silent, open battles" against "dark powers"; "beautiful blossoms" destroyed by a "monstrosity"; "ruins and ashes" following the devastation; and, above all, the inextinguishable flames "still shining forth," impatiently awaiting a better age; these set the stage for the scene that would be fully performed only by Daniel Paul Schreiber. His father's contribution to this development can be summed up by the epigraph to his *Panymnastikon*: "The prevailing institution of gymnastics suffers in general from a random plurality of different forms of exercise. What we need is a system."⁴

Accordingly, Moritz Schreiber saw his mission as that of bestowing scientific cultivation upon the "young and ennobled instinct of the . . . still healthy root of Germanic national life." Long before he invented the garden that was to immortalize his name, he was convinced that his historical mission could only be that of gardener to the German spirit and body. As an educator he strove to separate, even in children, the "noble" from the "base spores"; as a physician he was convinced that moral improvement is inseparable from the body's condition. For the epigraph to his first book—*The Book of Health*—he chose a quotation by Rückert: "Bear in mind that a god resides in your body and that the temple at all times must be spared desecration."⁵ For his son, too, a god was to reside in the body, but the temple was not to escape desecration.

Indeed, not even Dr. Schreiber senior was spared. In 1851, during his daily gymnastic exercises, a heavy iron ladder fell on his head, inducing a chronic headache that affected him until his death in 1861. During this period of declining health the elder

Dr. Schreiber is supposed to have experienced "hallucinations with a pathological urge to murder" (according to the medical history written by his son).⁶

The family friend of the German people, a man who aspired to lead his fathers and mothers to domestic happiness, to contribute to popular health and to the ennoblement of man, left behind a wife, two sons, and three daughters. The oldest son, Daniel Gustav, became a lawyer, as his brother, Daniel Paul, did soon after him. Whether Daniel Gustav ever achieved his father's goals, we do not know; we know only that he was named *Gerichtsrat* (judge) in 1877 and that, several weeks later, he took his life with a gun. He was thirty-eight years old, his brother thirty-four.

What, then, do we know about Dr. Schreiber? Up to his electoral defeat, not very much. We are, however, able to make several conjectures about his childhood and upbringing, since his father had very definite ideas about child rearing. The following passage from his *Book of Health* demonstrates his philosophy quite clearly:

The tempers of the small child, making themselves known by the child's screaming and crying for no apparent reason, . . . expressing nothing more than whim, the first emergence of obstinacy, . . . must be confronted in a positive manner . . . by quickly diverting the child's attention, through stern admonitions or, if all else fails . . . by repeated, physically perceptible admonitions . . . In this way—and only in this way—the child becomes conscious of its dependence on the external world and learns . . . submission . . . This kind of procedure is necessary but once, or at most twice—and one will have become master of the child forever.⁷

That the author of these lines became "master" of his child—indeed, "forever"—is just as certain as the fact that one of these children, Daniel Paul, never, for the rest of his life, ceased to cry out against this authority.⁸ Other than that, most of what we know about the life of Daniel Paul Schreiber derives from what he wrote about himself and from the descriptions contained in the medical records of the various asylums where he spent twelve years of his life.⁹ According to one such report Schreiber "was quite gifted and had always been an excellent pupil. He is described as being of good-natured and sociable character. In his

later life he demonstrated great talent and climbed the rungs of the career ladder relatively quickly. His last position was that of *Senatspräsident* [president of a panel of judges] at the Superior Country Court [court of appeal] at Dresden. He led, as far as we know, a thoroughly respectable life."¹⁰

The single event that might have cast a faint shadow on this thoroughly respectable life—prior to his illness—was his marriage to Sabine Behr, daughter of a senior director at the Municipal Theater in Leipzig, hence a match the Schreiber family hardly considered suitable. Not only did Schreiber have a famous father; for three hundred years the family itself had been prominent for its outstanding lawyers and scholars. Daniel Paul's great-grandfather, Daniel Godefredus Schreiberus (as he called himself with his latinized name), was the first Schreiber to attain literary renown, through works that reveal a clear affinity to the pursuits of descendants such as Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Schreiber. We find for example that the grandfather of the man who invented the Schreiberarten was himself concerned with agricultural problems as impediments to human progress. One might mention his *Report on the Caterpillars Which in 1751 and in the Current Year Caused Great Devastation to the Harvest in Thuringia and Adjoining Areas of Saxony*, as well as his *Instructions on Stabilizing Quicksand and Making Arid Fields into Meadows*, published in Leipzig in 1764.¹¹ A family tradition like this can hardly have been without consequence for the little known Dr. Daniel Paul Schreiber, especially following his unsuccessful candidacy for the *Reichstag*. Shortly thereafter, he was afflicted with hypochondria, in particular, with the notion that he was becoming emaciated. Finally, it became necessary to commit Dr. Schreiber to the Psychiatric Clinic at the University of Leipzig, in a "very unstable state of mind" according to the hospital records, and concerned that he would "die any moment of a heart attack."¹² Again, we know very little about this first sojourn in the Leipzig clinic, which lasted six months. The extant medical records mention speech impediments, two suicide attempts, hypersensitivity to noise and a "weepy disposition." Schreiber himself writes only about certain difficulties in using the scales, whose construction was unfamiliar to him, and whose accuracy he was therefore unable to verify. He nonetheless allows that these "are only minor points on which I place little importance." (*M*, p. 62). His weight remained a primary cause of concern for him, however: he was still claiming at the time of his discharge to

have lost thirty to forty pounds ("gained 2 lbs.," a report states laconically).¹³ In the Leipzig clinic Schreber met for the first time Dr. Paul Emil Flechsig, the clinic director who treated him and whose photograph stood for many years on the desk of Schreber's wife.

After being discharged in 1885, Schreber resumed his work as a judge and "spent eight happy years with my wife, on the whole quite happy ones, rich also in outward honors and marred only from time to time by the repeated disappointment of our hope of being blessed with children" (*M*, p. 63). The high point of these years was Schreber's appointment as *Senatspräsident* at the Dresden Superior State Court. In the period immediately preceding his official appointment, when he had already been informed of it, he dreamed that his "earlier neuroses had returned." Stranger still is the following incident: "One morning while still in bed (whether still half asleep or already awake I cannot remember), I had a feeling which, thinking about it later when fully awake, struck me as highly peculiar. It was the idea that it really must be rather pleasant to be a woman succumbing to intercourse. This idea was so foreign to my whole nature that I may say I would have rejected it with indignation if fully awake" (*M*, p. 63).

Following worsening insomnia and states of anxiety, he placed himself—shortly after assuming his new office—once again under the care of Dr. Flechsig. The initial session was encouraging: Flechsig displayed "a remarkable eloquence which affected me deeply" (*M*, p. 65), Schreber recalled; but his condition declined rapidly despite Flechsig's eloquence and that of his assistant, Dr. Täuscher—"I cannot deny him also my recognition [*Anerkennung*] of the excellent way he spoke to me on that occasion" (*M*, p. 67). Yet Schreber was soon to be occupied with voices and discourses of a much different nature—indeed, ceaselessly for the next eight years in which he was institutionalized, until his discharge in 1902 (and no doubt even after that). He recorded the history of these years in a book which brought the fame that had eluded him in politics: *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, published in 1903, made its author the "most frequently quoted patient in psychiatry," according to Macalpine and Hunter (*M*, p. 8), as he became "the Schreber case."

Although the *Memoirs* went through only one edition, a large part of which was bought up and destroyed by horrified family

members, the book was quickly declared a textbook by the psychiatric community, and Schreber was celebrated as a perfect example of paranoia. Whether these developments were known to Schreber himself is not certain, but in any case they fulfilled a wish he formulates at the end of his book: "And so I believe I am not mistaken in expecting that a very special palm of victory will eventually be mine. I cannot say with any certainty what form it will take. As possibilities I would mention . . . that great fame will be attached to my name surpassing that of thousands of other people much better mentally endowed" (*M*, p. 214).

Eight years after the *Memoirs* appeared, Freud published his "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)" and transformed the Schreber case from a psychiatric case into a psychoanalytic one whose renown, while limited, has been tenacious. In the same year that Freud's essay appeared (1911), when that "special palm of victory" was finally his, Daniel Paul Schreber died in the Leipzig asylum where since 1907—for the third time—he had been hospitalized. For the final portion of his life we are again dependent upon medical records. The important events in the period following his discharge in 1903 are the death of his mother, with whom he had then lived for a time, as well as his wife's stroke shortly before the third onset of his own illness. His years of institutionalization are marked both by increasing isolation and by repeated efforts to communicate nonetheless. The author of the *Memoirs* often tried to "express his wishes in undecipherable written characters." Again and again, he is said to have called out, in a tormented voice, "Ha—ha!"¹⁴

Who, then, has ever heard of Dr. Schreber? Other than the psychiatrists and the psychoanalysts, who knew him only as a "case," few people indeed. Walter Benjamin counted *Memoirs* among his collection of books authored by the mentally ill. Elias Canetti devotes two chapters of *Crowds and Power* to Schreber, again as a "case," though not as a purely psychological one; he treats Schreber as a paragon of the "ruler."¹⁵ And today in France "Le Président Schreber" belongs to the canon of the often mentioned but rarely read.¹⁶ Will we ever learn who he was?

The Schreber Case: Reason on Trial

Perhaps the question seems unnecessary: after all, we have Schreber right here, in our very hands, before our eyes; we need only read the book to become acquainted with it—and with

him. But what do we mean by "know" and by "read"? It may not be entirely unwarranted, before turning to the text itself, to linger a moment on this question. For "knowing" can mean many things, as Hegel's well-known distinction, between the "well-known" and "knowing well" (between *bekannt* and *kennt*) reminds us:

The well-known, just because it is familiar, is not known well. The commonest way in which we deceive either ourselves or others about knowledge is by assuming it to be familiar, and accepting it on that account; with all its pros and cons, such knowing never gets anywhere, and it knows not why. Subject and Object, God, Nature, Understanding, sense experience and so on, are uncritically taken for granted as familiar, established as valid, and made into fixed points of departure and return. While these remain unmoved, the knowing activity goes back and forth between them, thus moving only on their surface.¹⁷

Even the most cursory look at how Schreber's *Memoirs* has been received to date reveals a discrepancy between the "fixed points" of the text and the interpretation by its readers, mainly psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, who generally seek in it the familiar and the long-known, and who—*mirabile dictu*—find it there. What Freud asserted critically, of the "interest felt by the practical psychiatrist in such delusional formations as these," namely that "marvelling is not the beginning of understanding,"¹⁸ also holds for such readers. What is at issue here is whether this text is to be read solely as a case, and if so, then as what kind. Schreber himself was convinced that his was "a quite remarkable case, unique in the field of psychiatric experience" (*M*, p. 292): an exemplar, perhaps, but a unique and therefore notable one. His physician, Geheimrat (Privy Councillor) Dr. Weber, saw the matter quite differently:

But however varied and differently coloured the individual cases of mental illness may be, however characteristic and singular an individual case may appear to careful observation, yet . . . one cannot deny that . . . certain groupings emerge, certain complexes of pathological manifestations, which in their development, course and outcome, in the involvement of single psychic functions are more or less demarcated from each other [and] . . . have led to the delineation of a certain number of different disease forms. As

colourful and inexhaustible the individual variations of cases of mental illness may be, as constant are the main outlines, and apart from the arabesques of the individual case the basic characteristics of the forms of illness are repeated with almost surprising, monotonous regularity. (*M*, p. 317)

The case is—so to speak—clear as daylight. As "colourful and inexhaustible" the individual characteristics that depart from the norm may be, the "main outlines" are nonetheless "constant"—and repeat themselves with the same monotonous regularity as Dr. Weber's rolling sentences. The individual case may well be "varied and differently coloured," but this is the coloring of an arabesque, a variation that celebrates the individual detail without ever questioning its membership within a larger whole. One immediately knows of what the exemplar is an example; only a madman or the ignorant layperson would ever place it into question: "Considered from this scientifically established point of view [Dr. Schreber's] mental illness and its peculiarities, far from not being known to psychiatry, clearly belong to a well-known and well-characterized form of mental illness, paranoia, and shows all its important distinguishing features" (*M*, p. 317).

Dr. Weber's exposition demonstrates clearly what for traditional psychiatry (yet not for it alone) an exemplar or case is: subsumption under the well-known, "paranoia," by identifying "all its important distinguishing features." If psychiatrists celebrated the Schreber case, then, they did so because they saw it not as something unique, but rather as a particular example, replete with "all [the] important distinguishing features"—symptoms—of paranoia.

We find that psychiatrists essentially knew Schreber long before they ever met him either in person or through his writing. They valued his writing but only as a particular case in which they thought they found what they had already always known: that cluster of characteristics which they termed "paranoia." As an individual case Schreber mirrored their knowledge, and the persons thus reflected were delighted. In this individual instance of the pathology of paranoia, psychiatry discovered its own image and thought it had thereby recognized Dr. Schreber as well.

That the consequences of this attitude are not merely academic is shown by the following example: during the lawsuit, in which Schreber challenged his being placed under tutelage for reasons of mental illness, Dr. Weber in several court-ordered opinions

expresses his view that the proposed publication of *Memoirs* was only further evidence of the author's mental derangement. That Schreber "felt the urge to describe the history of his latter years" might, Dr. Weber allows, still be "understandable":

But the patient harbours the urgent desire to have his "Memoirs" . . . printed and made available to the widest circles and he is therefore negotiating with a publisher—until now of course without success. When one looks at the content of his writings, and takes into consideration the abundance of indiscretions relating to himself and others contained in them, the unembarrassed detailing of the most doubtful and aesthetically impossible situations and events, the use of the most offensive vulgar words, etc., one finds it quite incomprehensible that a man otherwise tactful and of fine feeling could propose an action which would compromise him so severely in the eyes of the public, were not his whole attitude to life pathological, and he unable to see things in their proper perspective, and if the tremendous overvaluation of his own person caused by lack of insight into his illness had not clouded his appreciation of the limitations imposed on man by society. (*M*, pp. 282–283)

Of Dr. Weber's argument—whose significance cannot be underestimated in a lawsuit concerning nothing less than the individual's right to determine the course of his own life—Freud remarks: "Surely we can hardly expect that a case history which sets out to give a picture of deranged humanity and of its struggles to rehabilitate itself should exhibit 'discretion' and 'aesthetic' charm."¹⁹

No doubt about it: the contrast apparent here between the traditional psychiatrist and the founder of psychoanalysis marks a change, from a concept of science characterized by a narcissistic self-satisfaction with the well-known, to an effort to bring these "fixed points" into motion and to pose questions which might lead to new knowledge. And yet—or perhaps, therefore—the question of the structure and goal of this knowledge becomes unavoidable. Even though Freud's reading is incomparably more differentiated and productive than a traditional psychiatrist's was or ever could be, for Freud, too—and even more so for his epigones—Schreber's text remained a description of a particular instance or case, a medical record. Not the

least of Freud's interests in the Schreber case was to confirm psychoanalytic theory in an area where it was less at home: psychosis. In his interpretation of the case Freud attempts to demonstrate that the conceptual apparatus of psychoanalysis is legitimate. The goal, he writes, is to find with the aid of psychoanalysis "a translation of the paranoic mode of expression into the normal one," the "normal" mode being none other than the language of psychoanalysis. In a certain sense, then, and like traditional psychiatry, Freud's discourse preserves the "fixed points of departure and return" criticized by Hegel. With his own peculiar mixture of tact and purposiveness, Freud explores Schreber's proliferating phantasms, drawing them ever closer to a fixed point within his theory in order finally to be able to assert in an unmistakably triumphant tone: "Thus in the case of Schreber we find ourselves once again on the familiar ground of the father-complex."²⁰ Yet the translation from a paranoic mode of expression (Schreber's) to a normal one (the psychoanalytic) succeeds almost too well, and Freud feels compelled to refer to the independence of the theory: "These and many other details of Schreber's delusional structure sound almost like endopsychic perceptions of the processes whose existence I have assumed in these pages as the basis of our explanation of paranoia. I can nevertheless call a friend and fellow-specialist to witness that I had developed my theory of paranoia before I became acquainted with the contents of Schreber's book."²¹

Freud did not, he asserts, plagiarize Schreber, although the similarity of their views leads him to ask, "whether there is more delusion in my theory than I should like to admit, or whether there is more truth in Schreber's delusion than other people are as yet prepared to believe."

This remark is not mere coquetry on Freud's part; rather, it indicates what is essentially new in a theory that, unlike traditional psychiatry, no longer unquestioningly presupposes a boundary between madness and truth, between the pathological and the normal, between irrationality and reason. Hence the special structure of psychoanalytic "translation": it is no longer merely a *procedure of assumption* but now also a *practice of reading and interpretation*:

[Schreber] himself not infrequently presses the key into our hands, by adding a gloss, a quotation or an example to some delusional proposition in an apparently incidental manner, or even by expressly denying some parallel to it

that has arisen in his own mind. For when this happens, we have only to follow our usual psycho-analytic technique—to strip his sentence of its negative form, to take his example as being the actual thing, or his quotation or gloss as being the original source—and we find ourselves in possession of what we are looking for, namely a translation of the paranoic mode of expression into the normal one.²²

Freud's method of reading no longer consists merely in collecting, describing and uncritically evaluating characteristic traits (*Merkmale*); on the contrary, it focuses on what might be called the text's "strains" or "marks" (*Male*), on that which is incidental, which has been added, that which is considered unimportant and has been denied: not *Merkmale*, but *Male* are sought after and noted down, as the carriers of a meaning expressible only through disguise and distortion.

Psychoanalysis, then, at least in Freud's version, is not a theory of *Merkmale*, which takes the subject's statements merely as the neutral expression of a content; rather, it attempts to understand forms of articulation as if they themselves were the contents, as in dreams, jokes, and slips of various kinds. Freud's approach to dreams considers a dream not as the *formation of meanings* but as the *deformation of wishes*, not as *Darstellung* but as *Entstellung*. The distinction is crucial. Whereas an expressionist theory neglects the conditions under which the expressed arose in favor of its meaning, Freud tries to work out just these conditions. His concept of the unconscious works less with definite contents than with mechanisms of articulation like "condensation," "displacement," and a "concern with the ability of something to be expressed" (*Rückzicht auf Darstellbarkeit*), the goal of which is not the expression or communication of meaning, but its distortion in the service of censorship.

This theory of unconscious articulation as distortion allows Freud to question the uniqueness of the Schreber case from the very start of his study. The key question is whether "a printed case history can take the place of personal acquaintance with the patient."²³ Freud's answer derives from the peculiar nature of paranoia. Paranoics possess "the peculiarity of betraying . . . precisely those things which other neurotics keep hidden as a secret." Furthermore, as Freud explains, this betrayal always takes place "in a distorted form." But this interpretation only establishes the possibility of examining paranoic persons psychoanalytically; the problem of a text as a substitute for the

bodily presence of the analysand requires additional grounding. This Freud finds in the peculiar mode of the paranoic form of expression: paranoics "say only what they choose to say." It is a question of paranoic speech as a pure *discourse of the will*: "Since paranoics cannot be compelled to overcome their internal resistances," they are not willing to enter into the dialogue of analysis and therefore can be examined using their written expressions just as if they were personally present. They say only what they want to say—and yet in so doing they say (or write) something else: for they betray themselves, indeed even more so than the neurotic, precisely because they say only what they want to say—"in a distorted form," to be sure. But what can "distortion" mean in this context?

In one of his last essays Freud treats this issue in the context of the biblical presentation and distortion of the story of Moses. Freud argues for a twofold understanding of the word "distortion": "We might well lend the word *Entstellung* [distortion] the double meaning to which it has a claim but of which today it makes no use. It should mean not only 'to change the appearance of something' but also 'to put something in another place, to displace.'²⁴

Freud's description of the biblical text as distortion is equally valid for the paranoic's text, and in particular for *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*:

Thus almost everywhere noticeable gaps, disturbing repetitions and obvious contradictions have come about—indications which reveal things to us which [the text] was not intended to communicate. In its implications the distortion of a text resembles a murder: the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed, but in getting rid of its traces . . . Accordingly, in many instances of textual distortion, we may nevertheless count upon finding what has been suppressed and disavowed, hidden away somewhere else, though changed and torn from its context. Only it will not always be easy to recognize it.²⁵

Distortion, according to Freud, is to be understood not only as the deformation of something originally undistorted, but as a change of location, or a displacement, as well. Yet this word "displacement" also denotes a mechanism of unconscious articulation: the displacement of psychic intensities—called "cathexis" or "occupation"—from one representation to another, along a

chain of associations. The distortion of a text mirrors in this way the dislocation of the subject, which is a necessary effect of the unconscious. The subject of the unconscious—according to Freud, the subject itself—is no longer constituted by the identity and transparency of self-consciousness, no longer the Cartesian *cogito* or the Hegelian *Begriff*; no longer the subject of knowledge and the will alone, but also and above all, that of *unconscious desire*: that is, the subject of the unconscious is mediated by an irreducible heterogeneity, a foreignness—by a dislocation that no dialectic can overcome or transcend.

Hence, a different kind of reading is required to unravel the discourse of a will that says only what it wants to say and thus always, as distortion (and this is especially clear in the case of paranoia), is already displaced, relocated, moved somewhere else, recorded in a text of desire that, like desire itself, is articulated through gaps, repetitions, contradictions: in short, it is expression through the contours of a conflict. Consequently, what till now we have called “knowing,” displaces and distorts itself. Insofar as the objects of unconscious knowledge are constituted by a conflict of desire, they resist being grasped conceptually; as with dreams, an untranslatable, idiosyncratic, singular residue always remains.²⁶ It persists, however, not as the arabesque of a unique occurrence, but as the necessary, if idiosyncratic, materialization and localization of a process of articulation. Although such a process includes logical thought and makes reason possible, it itself is not governed by reason. The unconscious articulates a “case” (*der Fall*) of reason; it lures reason into a trap (*die Falle*) and falls it there. It is in this sense, perhaps, that the case of Schreber lives up to its title and becomes “worthy of thought”: *denkwürdig*, and not merely “memorable.”

The History of an Illness: Body, Soul, and Nerves

However one reads it, Schreber's text *Memoirs* is not an easy one. It operates alternately on three levels, all different yet closely connected: the first recounts the history of Schreber's illness, his life in asylums, his efforts to have the order placing him under tutelage rescinded; the second is devoted to his “personal experiences,” as he calls them; the third deals with that all-encompassing context, the “cosmic order” (*Weltordnung*) and its crises—a context which provides the meaning of all that appears and all that is experienced. For the sake of simplicity, let us begin

with the external history of Schreber's illness—that is, with his case—so that we can subsequently enter with him into his own trap.

The period of his second hospitalization lasted from November 1983, when he was admitted to the Leipzig clinic, until his discharge at his own request (following his successful lawsuit against his tutelage) from the State Asylum Sonnenstein in Pirna (near Dresden) on 20 December 1902. The extant medical bulletins describe his initial condition as follows:

At first more hypochondriacal complaints, that he suffers from a “softening of the brain, will soon die,” etc., at the same time mixed with delusions of persecution, that “he has now been made happily insane.” Also hallucinations now and then, which gave him quite a fright . . . He thinks he is dead and has begun to rot, that he is no longer in a condition “fit for burial”; that he is “plague-stricken,” probably as a result of olfactory hallucinations; that his penis was twisted off by means of a “nerve probe”; he thinks he is a woman, but also often claims he must repulse energetically “the homosexual love of certain persons.” All of these things tormented him greatly so that he wished for death; he tried to drown himself in the bathtub and for many weeks demanded daily “the glass of cyanide destined for him.” The auditory and visual hallucinations sometimes became so strong that he spent hours at a time in a chair or in bed completely inaccessible, squinting his eyes. The delusions of his senses apparently were of ever-changing content, referring in the more recent period of his stay at the Leipzig clinic to his belief that he was being tortured to death in a ghastly manner. He then lost himself more and more in a mystic-religious dimension, maintaining that God spoke openly to him, that vampires and devils make game of him. He said he wanted to convert to the Roman Catholic Church in order to avoid being persecuted. He then saw apparitions, heard sacred music and, finally, apparently thought he was in another world. At least he considered everything around him to be spirits, taking his environment to be a world of illusions. . . . At that time Flechsig considered him dangerous to himself and to others.²⁷

This description, which coincides in part with what I quoted from the *Memoirs* above, has the advantage of bringing into bold

relief two aspects that will prove decisive in Schreber's case: first, his *body* as the favored object of his imaginings (at first in a mostly negative sense: he claims to suffer from a softening of the brain, to feel himself to be dead, to have begun to decay, to be plague-stricken, to have had his penis twisted off, and so on); and second, the aspect of *language*, in the form of verbal hallucinations ("God spoke openly to him"). The homosexual aspect also appears ("he thinks he is a woman"), and this in connection both with fantasies of castration and with illusions of persecution (that he had to repulse the "homosexual love of certain persons")—a complex that Freud places at the very center of his interpretation.

Above all, a reading of the medical bulletin, as well as the memoirs themselves, reveals the increasing significance of linguistic phenomena for Schreber. Even his initial inaccessibility seems to have actually been a form of *listening*: "He was in a state of great psychic excitation, at the outset inaccessible, sullen, almost gloomy. He was uncomfortable with any and all conversation. He hallucinated intensely, showed little interest in his surroundings, but stood around in the same position with a frightened look on his face, staring out into the distance. It was observed in the garden how he placed his hands on his ears, listening intensely."

If at first he refused all communication with physicians and nurses, one of his "reasons," it appears, was his concern with other "communications": "At times obviously harassed by voices, never spoke to anyone about this." Later, in his memoirs, Schreber argues that he did not articulate his visions and experiences because their complexity exceeded the capacity of oral communication—as anyone who reads the memoirs will agree.

On the surface Schreber remains, for a period, passive ("is never occupied with anything, does not read anything," the medical record remarks). Yet already in November 1894 there are signs of a turn toward activity, toward behavior that will be of the greatest significance for his later development. "On the whole somewhat more lively, writes shorthand and draws figures on paper". Schreber begins to write.

From this point on writing assumes an increasingly important role in his life, in addition to the hallucinatory transformations of his body. A description of his condition in June 1895 reads: "Completely under the influence of delusions. Maintains that his

body is completely changed, that one of his lungs has almost completely disappeared, that everything that he sees around him is merely appearance. That the world has perished. . . . Calm again for periods. Writes many letters, also in Italian, signed himself once 'Paul Höllenfürst' [literally, "Prince of Hell"]. He addressed one letter to 'Mr. Ormuzd in *coelo*.'"

Thus, Schreber not only listens, he writes. Shortly thereafter he adds a new component: he not only writes, he screams. The "bellowing miracle" appears on the scene. *What* he screams about is not without interest: "Often screams out the window at night, always the same terms of abuse, or 'I am Senatspräsident Schreber.'" These terms of abuse may well have been intended for that other Schreber, who recommended that one make oneself master of his child forever. The abuse, and the bellowing of his name and high official title, all point to Schreber's struggle for his own identity, a battle to be waged within language and by means of language.

In 1896, as his interest in his immediate environment slowly begins to reawaken, Schreber's body is subjected to a new form of alteration. Whereas previously it has been mainly an object of decomposition and destruction, it is now increasingly affected by a more positive change: "Has let himself go in his appearance, inadequately dressed, shows the physician his naked upper body, claiming that 'he now has almost female breasts.' The only real changes are greater fat deposits, given that the patient has gained greatly in weight." With the onset of what in the *Memoirs* is called "unmanning" or "transformation into a woman," his body assumes a new function: it becomes an object to be looked at, gazed upon, thus Schreber's willingness to show the doctor his exposed upper body.

"Seems quite preoccupied with sexual notions, likes very much to look up nudes in illustrated magazines, evidently draws them as well. In a letter to his wife—in Italian—writes that the nights are very pleasant because he always has 'un pou die voluptue feminae [sic]'" This mingling of the sexes not only takes place in Schreber's body, but applies as well to a divine interlocutor: "Continues to bellow, often quite offensive terms of abuse: 'The sun is a whore' or 'God is a whore.'" Already at an earlier time Schreber had been greatly preoccupied with the sun, and he had been observed standing "for a long time in one place, emotionless, looking into the sun and all the while making the most bizarre faces." At the conclusion of his book he maintains

that the sun pales before his very gaze. In any case, seeing and being seen gain in significance.

He now becomes ever more "talkative and accessible, reads more." In 1897 he conducts a "lively correspondence with wife and relatives, written in a polite and proper manner, the letters betraying not the slightest sign of illness. Talks about his sickness apparently with complete insight." Only the old "bellowing sessions and face-making" continue, joined by several new forms of coquetry: "Adorns himself with colorful ribbons, now and then engages in quite trivial dalliances." "Often naked in his room, laughing and yelling in front of a mirror, adorned with colorful ribbons."

At the beginning of 1899 he speaks for the first time about the content of his experiences, in a "detailed letter to his wife . . . The lucidity and logical acuity with which he develops his system is striking." From this period onward he is increasingly occupied with the question of his tutelage, which as early as 1895—and without his knowledge—had been declared temporarily, and later in March 1900 was upheld as permanent. Schreber contested this ruling at about the time he was writing his *Memoirs*. The major portion was written between February and September of 1900, too early to play a role in the initial appeal proceedings, which ended in 1901 in Schreber's favor. The text, enlarged by several "postscripts" as well as by an appendix ("In What Circumstances Can a Person Considered Insane Be Detained in an Asylum against His Declared Will?"), was submitted as testimony in the appeal proceedings, which on 14 July 1902 led to the rescission of Schreber's tutelage by the Royal State Superior Court.

The court's argumentation is of interest even today. Its verdict found that the plaintiff was unquestionably mentally ill; whereas Schreber himself maintained that, although he was *nervously ill*, he was not *mentally ill*, in other words, that his experience was of an objective nature. Despite this disagreement, the court did accept Schreber's view that the decisive issue was not his mental state but, rather, whether he was capable of taking care of his own affairs and defending his own interests. The court agreed with the plaintiff that he was indeed entirely capable of doing this. Remarkable however is the court's assessment of the *Memoirs*. Recall that for Geheimrat Dr. Weber, director of the asylum, well-known court psychiatrist, and Schreber's physician, the intention to publish the text was in itself proof of

Schreber's mental illness. The court firmly rejected this opinion, arguing first that such intent does not violate the author's objective interests (that is, it did him no financial harm); and second that:

One also cannot maintain that the contents of the "Memoirs" are such as to compromise [the] plaintiff himself. The manuscript is the product of a morbid imagination and nobody reading it would for a moment lose the feeling that its author is mentally deranged. But this could not possibly lower the patient in the respect of his fellow men, particularly as no one can miss the seriousness of purpose and striving after truth which fill every chapter. As Dr. Schreber remarks correctly, the worst that could happen to him would be that one consider him mad, and this one does in any case. (*M*, p. 354)

This opinion manifests a liberality that surprisingly—although perhaps not entirely uninfluenced by its authors' collegial relation to the plaintiff, as well as by his high position—belongs to an Enlightenment tradition whose influence on German jurisprudence was surely not overwhelming at the time. Yet we should not overlook the precondition for such tolerance: fools, like poets, enjoy greater freedom than average citizens, precisely because they are fools. There is a further component to be noted here, one to which we will return: the court's recognition of Schreber's "seriousness of purpose and striving after truth, which fill each chapter." However much it may otherwise have erred, the court nonetheless acknowledged that Schreber was only trying to be *more rational than reason itself*. Hence all the more surprising is the court's argument in making allowances for Schreber's style of discourse, which Dr. Weber had strongly censured: "One cannot be offended by the strong language in the book. It is not [the] plaintiff's; he only repeats what the voices of spirits spoke into him in earlier years when he was most severely hallucinated" (*M*, p. 355).

To appreciate adequately the significance of this concession, one need only juxtapose it to the opinion of Dr. Weber, concerning the relationship of Schreber's madness to his other views: "It is true that every delusional system," Dr. Weber writes, "must somehow influence all the patient's ideas because its bearer is an 'individual,' that is, indivisible . . ." (*M*, p. 318). By contrast, the court seems prepared to place this principle of

the indivisible individual into doubt: it considers Schreber's text (whether dictated to him or composed by him) as a different language, one foreign to him ("merely a reproduction of phantasm voices"). The Royal State Superior Court at Dresden thus accepts that an author is not necessarily—at least *de jure*—responsible for "his" text.

The Cosmic Order; or, The Gap in the Voges

Having familiarized ourselves with the case history of Daniel Paul Schreber, we should now turn to the remarkable history of his *nervous illness*—however distorted or abridged this account may be. Schreber himself starts with an explication of the "Cosmic Order,"²⁸ that is, with a world that has not yet fallen into disorder. This world—like its divine creator—consists mainly of nerves: God is "from the very beginning . . . only nerve," and he creates the world when his nerves transform themselves into "rays," which can then become anything at all. Humans are likewise nerve, in the sense that their souls are contained in nerve.

Let us dwell on these nerves for a moment, since they form the fundamental elements of Schreber's universe. In terms of their composition they are very strange things indeed. They evidently unite the highest interiority and immanence, on the one hand, with the greatest exteriority and heteronomy, on the other. The nerves—"nerves of understanding,"²⁹ as they are called—are like monads, inasmuch as every single mental nerve "represents the entire mental indivisibility of a human being"; the number of nerves a person has influences the *duration* of his identity, but not his *identity* itself. To this extent the nerves represent that which is internal and identical in a person. Yet as parts of the body—they are essentially corporeal in that they occupy space and are material—the nerves are necessarily dependent on external impressions and impulses in order to be "jarred into vibration."

The nerve, as the inner essence of humans, requires the external and the foreign in order to function. The relationship between internal and external, between the identical and the heterogeneous, is governed by identity, insofar as the original and lawful conditions which constitute the Cosmic Order obtain. God externalizes Himself as rays which transform themselves into the Creation; this Creation stands in a relation of otherness to God, it is His Other, until death, when the nerves

of the human—or, more precisely, of the human *corpe*—slowly, in a process of purification, re-ascend into the heavenly fields, there to be taken into God and to dissolve within Him. As long as the Cosmic Order prevails, it is governed by what Georges Bataille has called a "restricted economy": an economy of identity where nothing is lost, where every externalization is dialectically reapropriated, where every expenditure yields a return.³⁰ The Cosmic Order, the World-as-Yet-still-in-Order, follows reason and its laws, which are concentrated in one of the messages Schreber "receives," and which might very well have served as a motto for his entire work: "All nonsense cancels itself out" (*Aller Unsinn hebt sich auf*; *M*, pp. 151, 226).

But there is a hitch in this system or structure: the reason and cause, the beginning and end of this Cosmic Order, God, is likewise "to begin with . . . only nerve." Hence the aspect of the heteronomical and the nonidentical, which characterizes every nerve, characterizes God as well. Accordingly, Schreber's God is different from His more orthodox predecessors: He is corporeal—material and localized—subject (at least in part) to the laws of time and space. Moreover, heavenly existence consists in a "state of blessedness" which Schreber describes as "uninterrupted enjoyment" (*M*, p. 51). And this propensity for hedonism, rooted in the neural nature of God and of the souls that return to Him, is not without certain risks for God Himself. As a nerve, God depends upon others, on the nerves of humans, for instance. This is not a problem as long as He approaches their corpses to suck out the nerves (for which death is merely a form of sleep) and to draw them heavenward. Difficulties arise only in those exceptional cases where God, perhaps out of ignorance (for He knows the human only externally, as a cadaver), approaches the living human and—as Schreber describes it—"attaches" Himself to the human, forming a "nerve attachment."³¹ As long as it is the exception, for example, in the case of "highly gifted people (poets, etc.)," the nerve attachment does not cause any problems. However, "such 'nerve attachment' was not allowed to become the rule, as already mentioned, because for reasons which cannot be further elucidated, the nerves of living human beings, particularly when in a state of *high-grade excitation*, have such power of attraction for the nerves of God that He would not be able to free Himself from them again, and would thus endanger His own existence" (*M*, p. 48). In this case the normal course of things in the Cosmic Order

would be completely reversed, with fatal consequences. Before, these consequences, which form the *Memoirs'* real point of departure, can be discussed, several other characteristics of the Cosmic Order should be mentioned, if briefly, first, that it consists of beings who are not only corporeal, only nerve to start with, but who are equally determined by their language. As Schreber writes, "it seems to lie in the nature of rays that they must *speak* as soon as they are in motion; the relevant law was expressed in the phrase 'do not forget that rays must speak,' and this was spoken into my nerves innumerable times, particularly early on" (*M*, p. 121).

Here we confront a further peculiarity of Schreber's text: the objects he discusses are no less language than he himself is—a slightly disjointed, slightly twisted language, "the so-called 'basic-language,' a somewhat antiquated but nevertheless powerful German, characterized particularly by a wealth of euphemisms" (*M*, pp. 49–50). Everything that Schreber says about the Cosmic Order is based on communications he receives that utilize the "basic-language," characterized not only by shifts of meaning (though not always euphemistic ones), but also by a tendency not to finish sentences: "The souls were in the habit—even before the conditions contrary to the Cosmic Order had started—of giving their thoughts (when communicating with one another), grammatically incomplete expression, that is to say they omitted certain words which were not essential for the sense" (*M*, p. 70). It is as if the tendency of souls (or rays) not to complete their sentences was bound up with their character as transitional beings: they are aspects of an externalizing movement that emanates from a divine being and leads back to it. Blessedness, understood as the final goal of nerves returning to God, corresponds to meaning, understood as the final goal of a basic-language expression: both are intended and approximated, yet never quite attained.

It becomes increasingly clear that in this kind of Cosmic Order, crises and disruptions are, as it were, programmed, prior to all intervention from without. A God who is Himself all nerve and therefore dependent on external stimulation, who knows the human being only externally (as a cadaver), who now and then engages in a nerve attachment despite the risks involved; a language whose words have inverted meaning, whose sentences are begun but never finished, trudging in a meaning that is never more than approximate; above all, the entire, apparently stable,

restricted economy, including God, subject to the "unfathomable law" of the "power of attraction," "according to which rays and nerves mutually attract one another," in a reciprocity that "harbors a kernel of danger for the realms of God" (*M*, p. 59): all of this points to catastrophe as an immanent possibility of this order itself.

When it does take place, the catastrophe assumes the remarkable form of a *rip* or *tear*: "This 'miraculous structure'³² [the Cosmic Order] has recently suffered a rent, intimately connected with my personal fate" (*M*, p. 54)—thus begins Schreber's description of the misfortune which has befallen the Cosmic Order like a pestilence, wrenching it out of joint. The extra-ordinary nature of this tear in the wondrous structure has already been alluded to: it originates externally, as it were out of nothing, and it not only *sunders*, it *joins*, or is joined to Schreber's personal fate. A peculiarity of this special tear is that it *sunders in that it joins*. As Schreber writes:

It is impossible even for me to present the deeper connections in a way which human understanding can fully grasp. My personal experiences enable me to lift the veil only partially; the rest is intuition and conjecture. I want to say by way of introduction that the leading roles in the genesis of this development, the first beginnings of which go back perhaps as far as the eighteenth century, were played on the one hand by the names of Flechsig and Schreber (probably not specifying any individual member of these families), and on the other by the concept of *soul murder*. (*M*, p. 54)

At the beginning stands the joining of two names—Flechsig and Schreber, at first independent of their individual carriers—as well as the dark concept of "soul murder." According to Schreber, the latter seems to consist in one person's somehow taking "possession of another person's soul" (*M*, p. 55). This, he asserts, actually took place in the course of a feud between the Schreber and Flechsig families, both of which "belonged, it was said, to 'the highest nobility of heaven'" (*M*, p. 55).³³ Families that had had a falling out when the Flechsig family "had been outstripped in some way or other by members of the Schreber family" (*M*, p. 57). A certain "Daniel Fürchtegott Flechsig" (who, like the other Flechsigs named by Schreber, bears the names of his own ancestors)³⁴ actually managed to lure God into a nerve attachment, never to release him: "He resisted³⁵ breaking

off the attachment into which divine rays had directly or indirectly entered with him, or made it dependent on conditions which could not be denied him, considering the souls' natural weakness of character compared with that of living men, and in any case it was not thought possible to keep up permanent nerve attachment with a single human being" (*M*, p. 57). The Flechsig family thus attained an incredible power, which it used against the Schrebers: "One can imagine that in this way something like a conspiracy may have arisen between such a person and the elements of the anterior realms of God [the purified souls returning to God] to the detriment of the Schreiber race [*Geschlecht*], perhaps in the direction of denying them offspring or possibly only of denying them choice of those professions which would lead to closer relations with God such as that of a nerve specialist" (*M*, p. 57).

The obscurity of these events is rendered still more obscure by the censor, to whom the *Memoirs*' third chapter—dealing with "some events concerning other members of my family, which may possibly in some way be related to the presumed soul murder" (*M*, p. 61)—fell victim. Yet it becomes increasingly apparent to Schreiber that his encounter with Paul Emil Flechsig in the Leipzig University Psychiatric Clinic was no mere coincidence, but rather the result of considerable planning. Even though the plot was initiated by the Flechsig family, God's complicity seems ever more certain to Schreiber: "It occurred to me only much later, in fact only while writing this essay did it become quite clear to me, that God Himself must have known of the plan, if indeed He was not the instigator, to commit soul murder on me, and to hand over my body in the manner of a female harlot (*M*, p. 77).

On the one hand this description clearly shows that soul murder concerns not only the "surrender of a soul to another person" or the appropriation of "his mental powers" (*M*, p. 58; my emphasis); it also concerns the body, and this could hardly be otherwise since, in Schreiber's Cosmic Order, soul and mind are bound to the body's nerves. On the other hand, it becomes clear that the composition of the *Memoirs* is not simply a report; rather, it is part of, and participant in, the experience it recounts.

This explanation also sheds light on the peculiar goal of the conspiracy against Schreiber, which was initiated by soul murder: his body is to be surrendered to Professor Paul Emil Flechsig, as a "female prostitute" for purposes of sexual pleasure.

This implies the "unmanning" of Daniel Paul Schreiber, his "transformation into a woman" for purposes that contravene the Cosmic Order. Subsequently all sorts of "miracles" are directed at his body with the intention both of transforming him into a woman and also of destroying his physical "integrity" (see especially chapter 12). His limbs are wounded and lamed; his internal organs destroyed, removed from his body and replaced with new ones. Not only is his body attacked, but his mind is as well, at first through the body. One description of these attacks may serve for many:

These concerned firstly my head; secondly . . . also the spinal cord, which next to the head was considered as the seat of reason. One therefore attempted to pump the spinal cord out, which was done by so-called "little men" placed in my feet . . . The effect of the pumping out was that the spinal cord left my mouth in considerable quantity in the form of little clouds, particularly when I was walking in the garden . . . The miracles directed against my head and the nerves of my head happened in manifold ways. One attempted to pull the nerves out of my head, for a time even (during the nights) to transplant them into the head of M. who slept in the next room . . . Serious devastation was caused in my head by the so-called "flights of rays" . . . the effect of which was that my skull was repeatedly sawn asunder in various directions. (*M*, pp. 135-136)

These attacks on the integrity of his body and mind produce just the opposite of what was intended: the more he is assaulted, the more attractive his sorely tested nerves become, the greater the number of souls entering into and dissolving within him, the greater the danger to, and temptation of, God Himself (in His two forms of the lower God, Artiman, and the higher, Ormuzd). For the conspirators had overlooked and misconstrued the laws of the Cosmic Order: all the damage done by the "impure rays" (unpurified souls, called "tested souls" in the "basic language") can be reversed by "pure rays." The conspirators misunderstand above all the nature of emasculation. As Schreiber slowly learns, emasculation is "connected with the basic plan on which the Cosmic Order seems to rest" (*M*, p. 72), a plan that, in the case of catastrophes, makes possible the survival of the human race through divine insemination. After initial resistance, Schreiber thus consents to the plan for his unmanning so as to ensure this

survival against all eventualities. It would seem that the Cosmic Order's restricted economy, despite all the violations of it, will once again be able to defend and maintain itself, at least in the opinion of Daniel Paul Schreber, who places himself—his body, his mind, and his work—at the service of truth and science. Schreber's emasculation, the heightening of his nerves' attraction and the saturation of his body with "female nerves of lust" (*weibliche Wollusterven*), influencing in turn souls, rays, and ultimately the lower God Himself, implies not so much the possibility of impregnation as the certainty of demise: in the seductive power of the nerves, lust and death are mixed. But since souls "were used to uninterrupted enjoyment, and were therefore not or only little capable of temporary sacrifice or temporary denial of pleasure in order to procure permanent advantages in the future, a quality which is peculiar to human beings" (*M*, p. 75), they are all the more vulnerable to this danger. For the

dissolution in my body of the rays (which are separated from the totality of God's nerves) due to my power of attraction amounts to the end of their independent existence, like death is to man. It was therefore a matter of course that God should make all attempts to avoid the fate of having to perish in my body with more and more parts of His totality, and indeed one was not very particular in choosing the means of prevention. *But the attraction lost all its terror for these nerves, if and to the extent they met a feeling of soul-voluptuousness in my body in which they also participated.* They then regained in my body a more or less adequate substitute for the lost heavenly Blessedness which itself consisted in enjoyment similar to voluptuousness. (*M*, pp. 149–150)

The whole plot of his *Memoirs* is played out as repetitions and variations of this scenario: the divine assault, at first with Flechsig and then without him, on the integrity of Schreber's body and mind; Schreber's countertrack, together with World-Order elements (pure rays), which leads to an increase in his power of attraction; and, consequently, the danger to God, in turn calling forth the next heavenly assault, and so on.

These assaults are directed not only at the body, but also—once it became obvious that this body is inviolable, even for God—increasingly at his mind, with the goal of driving Schreber "mad," or at least making him appear so, thereby

diminishing his power of attraction. Schreber, however, leaves no doubt as to which of two adversaries is closer to insanity: for the divine plan overlooks the simple fact "that the nerves, even of a demented human being, would, in a state of highly pathological excitement retain their power of attraction" (*M*, pp. 120–121).

Mainly *linguistic* means are employed in these assaults on Schreber. I shall examine two of them more closely: the "system of notation" (*Aufzeichensystem*) and "compulsive thinking" (*Denkzwang*). Schreber describes a system of notation in which "books or other notes are kept in which . . . have been written down all my thoughts, all my phrases, all my necessities, all the articles in my possession or around me"—in short, anything at all having to do with Schreber. The writing is done by random, thoughtless souls, "bound" to some distant celestial bodies (an invention of Flechsig's to protect the souls from Schreber's power of attraction): "Their hands are led automatically, as it were, by passing rays for the purpose of making them write down" (*M*, p. 119).

The purpose of the notes made in this way is, on the one hand, to exhaust Schreber's store of thoughts—"this of course is quite absurd, because human thinking is inexhaustible," Schreber remarks—and, on the other hand, to provide material for the rays, which must talk continuously, "to fill in these pauses." Moreover, by means of this system of notation the rays, "in a manner hard to describe," are supposed to be "made unresponsive to the power of attraction of such a thought" (*M*, p. 122).

The system of notation reveals the entwinement of language and body, of desire and defense, that characterizes Schreber's text. The system is supposed to exhaust Schreber by establishing a complete inventory of his discourse; any and all of his linguistic expressions are to be fixed, that is, they are to be written down and removed from his control so as to neutralize, if not eliminate, his nerves' power of attraction. But, despite the "mental torture" caused him by the rays' know-it-all attitude—any thought or expression of Schreber's is met with: "We have this already" (already "written down" or "recorded")—he overcomes the system of notation, indeed not least of all by himself becoming a note taker: he writes his *Memoirs*. Only when writing is Schreber free from the power of his persecutors: "For all miracles are powerless to prevent the expression of ideas in writing" (*M*, p. 298).

I will return to the significance of Schreber's writing. But first let us examine the second attempt to destroy his mind by linguistic means: compulsive thinking. As the term suggests, this consists in "a human being having to think incessantly" (*M*, p. 70), as a result either of direct questioning ("What are you thinking about now?") or of those unfinished phrases that characterize the basic language as such, and that practically force the listener to complete them. The compulsion to introduce what has been omitted has to do with the "nature of nerves": "that if unconnected words or started phrases are thrown into them, they automatically attempt to complete them to finished thoughts satisfactory to the human mind." (*M*, p. 172).

The nerves are thus driven by a kind of *horror vacui* to complete the meaning still outstanding, regardless of the intentions of their subject (Schreber). The completion usually consists in nothing more than the repetition of often-heard phrases, hence it requires no special mental effort. If, for instance, Schreber hears the words, "It will be," then his nerves complete the phrase in a nonarbitrary way: "... done now, the joint of pork," whereby Schreber knows full well that "joint of pork" here signifies—in keeping with the basic language's twisted logic—nothing other than himself. "It was meant to express that I was done, i.e. that my power of resistance against the attacks on my reason by the rays must by now be exhausted" (*M*, p. 173). That Schreber should be called, of all things, a joint of pork becomes somewhat more understandable when we read why the voices resist finishing their sentences. Their goal is not only to force Schreber to expend his powers, thereby reducing his power of attraction, but also to prevent a development more dangerous still. As Schreber writes, "whenever expressed in a grammatically complete sentence, the rays would be led straight to me, and entering my body . . . temporarily increase its soul-voluptuousness. Not-finishing-a-sentence has apparently the effect that the rays are, as it were, held up half way, and could therefore withdraw before having added to the soul-voluptuousness in my body" (*M*, p. 173).

Earlier it was not Schreber who, as a joint of pork, had to fear the mouths of others; rather, the situation was reversed: "While conditions prevailed which were at least somehow in consonance with the Cosmic Order, that is before tying-to-rays and tying-to-celestial-bodies was started . . . , a momentary uniform feeling was enough to make the freely suspended souls jump

down from the sky into my mouth, thus ending their independent existence" (*M*, p. 173).

As the Cosmic Order was to some extent still intact, hence before the *tear* in its texture occurred or widened, *saying* a sentence to the point of its meaningful completion meant destroying the speaking rays in Schreber's mouth. This again confirms the entwining of speech and lust, of meaning and death. Thus it comes as no surprise that God and the rays (the voices) attempt everything to prevent this fatal completion: writing things down, tying (distant planets) to Earth, using sentences left incomplete, and using speech that has been slowed and distended in the extreme. No wonder they attempt—through "wonders"—to make incompetent (*ent-mündigen*) Schreber's mouth (*Mund*), to expropriate his linguistic expressions and communicate competence by means of compulsive thinking (which, as we have seen, implies *compulsive speech* as well); or more directly through a system of "misrepresentations," compelling Schreber's nerves to give answers he had not intended, which are foreign to him: or, more directly still, by means of the "bellowing miracle," forcing Schreber to bellow whether he wants to or not.

To Schreber, all this seems an abominable disregard for the Cosmic Order, resulting from its critical fissure. Still, he gives us good reason to mistrust such an easy explanation. The simple model of an undamaged, unwounded earlier state, torn or ripped by the intrusion of some calamity—or "apparition" (*Gesicht*), in the antiquating basic language—is difficult to reconcile with the peculiar structure of the nerves. Their "inherent" dependence on the external and the foreign, on stimulation and on unmitigated pleasure—this, their exogenic, exotic *lust principle*, destroys all order, all identity, and every restricted economy of expenditure-without-loss. At least for the nerves of Schreber's Cosmic Order³⁶ before and after the crisis, *lust* means *loss*. As long as God Himself, although participating in this process, could nonetheless be deemed to stand above it, as the beginning and the end, it seemed possible to amortize the loss of *lust* expended through a gain in identity. But when God Himself is drawn into the vortex of attraction—through a nerve attachment—this illusion can no longer be sustained. "Voluptuousness has become 'God-fearing'" (*M*, p. 210), say the voices, yet they express themselves here, as so often, euphemistically: it is not *lust* that has become God-fearing (beginning

with Daniel Furchtegott [literally, "God-fearing"], Fleischig and Schreber's nerve contact), but God who has learned to fear lust. And not without reason. For He is no longer involved with mere cadavers—like the physician who views a body mainly as a muscular mechanism; now He is engaged with flesh, living, excited nerves, nerves that have as their target nothing less than His existence and identity. And since God's identity, together with His economy of expenditure and reappropriation, represent here nothing other than a *fantasy of reason* (or, better, reason's nightmare), this struggle of identity with lust, this crisis of identity, acquires a more than merely "pathological" interest.

As much as one may attempt to distinguish the Before and After of the Cosmic Order, Schreber's text shows how they in fact overlap, how the After and the Exterior have always been present in the Interior of the Order of the World, as nerve. I have already mentioned a peculiarity of the voices, which was characteristic of them even before the crisis set in: their tendency not to finish sentences. Nonetheless one could still imagine that the act of speaking would guarantee the purity of identity and of the internal against everything foreign and external. It is spoken language in which Schreber (precisely in his struggles) places so much trust as that form of articulation which can most powerfully protect the subject's identity and property—"the human language (spoken aloud) . . . is the *ultima ratio* for preserving the sanctity of my house."³⁷ It is spoken language that can protect identity and property above all in Schreber's tormented head, the walls of which offer no protection against the ray-voices. Again and again he describes how the voices' "original" language, which continued to give "expression to genuine feeling," increasingly degenerates into rote phrases, "drummed" into "speaking birds," created by miracle (*M*, p. 85) to torment Schreber with their nonsense. How does Schreber describe this original language in his own text?

The language of souls and rays, God's basic language, is, we recall, a "language of nerves." According to Schreber, this can best be imagined "when one thinks of the processes by which a person tries to imprint certain words in his memory in a definite order, as for instance a child learning a poem by heart which he is going to recite at school, or a priest a sermon he is going to deliver in church. The words are *repeated silently* . . . that is to say a human being causes his nerves to vibrate in the way which corresponds to the use of the words concerned, but the real

organs of speech . . . are either not set in motion at all or only coincidentally" (*M*, p. 69).

Because of its very structure, this nerve language is anything but an expression of "genuine feeling": it is much less an expression than an impression, something remembered, not the expression of something inward but the emergence in the interior of something outward (*Auswendiges*), something "learned by rote" (*auswendig gelernt*), a system of assertions not much different from the much derided system of notation that is employed just as thoughtlessly. Schreber's language (or bellowing), expropriated in part by the rays, differs from the nerve language in one respect: that of control or disposition over speech. In "normal" circumstances (those which correspond to the Cosmic Order), the use of a particular nerve "depends only on the will of the person whose nerves are concerned," in keeping with "man's natural right to be master of his own nerves" (*M*, pp. 69-70). We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that the language of the nerves is, in and of itself, foreign to the subject, owing to the constitution of his own nerves (as mentioned above). Whether it wants to or not, as nerve the subject does not speak, it is spoken. Although Schreber does not say this in so many words, he writes it; or, perhaps more precisely, it writes him.

There would be much more to say about this silent contradiction between what Schreber wants to say out loud, and what, in a sense, writes itself between the lines, about this other show-place of unconscious distortion, where the entwinement of meaning, lust and death, the inversion of internal and external, of that which is one's own and that which is foreign appears in a new and fateful manner: much could be said about the place where the subject is no longer master of "his" language, but rather is subjected to it. But instead of discussing these matters, we will have to content ourselves with this brief mention in order to continue the retelling of Schreber's story.

From the time he begins writing there is for this author no question as to how his story is to end. All human and divine assaults on him are frustrated by the Cosmic Order's laws and by the power of his nerves: their power of attraction steadily increases, his body swells up, stuffed full of souls and rays, filled with nerves of female lust; and in his mind—steered by compulsive thinking, which has taught him to seek the cause and the purpose, the reason and the essence of things and not to dwell on

their simple appearance—there can be no doubt as to the outcome. The book closes with Schreber's brilliant and unquestionable victory on all fronts. With the cultivation of femininity "inscribed . . . on my banner" (*M*, p. 149), Schreber marches ever closer to his goal, that of being unmanned and impregnated by God; he proceeds less in a military goose-step than in a seductive goose-step, the meandering step of lust, in order thus to complete his seduction of God, thereby destroying his final resistance: "The experience of years has confirmed me in this view; indeed I believe that God would never attempt to withdraw (which always impairs my bodily well-being considerably) but would follow my attraction without resistance permanently and uninterruptedly, if only I could *always* be playing the woman's part in sexual embrace with myself, *always* rest my gaze on female beings, *always* look at female pictures, etc." (*M*, p. 210).

Schreber's main goal is to be God's own spectacle, continuously looking at women but more important, as the perfect woman in coitus with herself, *being looked at*. For God, however—that is, for the higher God, Ormuzd, who in distinction to His lower part, Ariman, has not yet succumbed entirely to Schreber's charms—matters appear somewhat differently. "Definitively tied" (*M*, p. 209) to Schreber's nerves, to his body, with a desire for continual pleasure and for unceasing passion, this God sees nothing in the world except Schreber. The diagnosis of a delusional relationship, Schreber remarks (*M*, pp. 251–252), applies less to him than to God, for whom he has become "the sole human being," and "the center of His interest." God has eyes for Schreber only: he stares, fixated, at him—and here a remarkable comparison occurs to Schreber—as "one used to say for many years after the 1870 war about the foreign policy of the French, that they stared at the gap in the Vosges as if hypnotized" (*M*, p. 232).

God stares at Schreber like . . . *God in Frankreich*. Yet surely God can hope for no more from this welcome sight than the French could from the gap in the Vosges. Is God perhaps pleased *because* he can observe the woman "in sexual embrace with [herself]"? Can it be that the spectacle helps him to forget, at least momentarily, that wretched and greivous hole?

Returning to Freud: Lacan

To answer these and other questions raised by a reading of the *Memoirs*, it is useful, if not indispensable, to return to the inter-

pretation given by orthodox, mainstream Freudian psychoanalysts. It has generally limited itself to confirming Freud's reading, while at the same time reducing that reading to its most problematic and schematic aspect: the thesis of denied or rejected homosexuality as the core of paranoia and a *fortiori* of Schreber's case. The psychoanalytic studies that have followed Freud have indeed discovered information about the Schreber case, some of it significant—the works of Baunmeyer, and Niederland, are particularly noteworthy.³⁸ Yet, with few exceptions, they have neglected to question either Freud's premises or their influence on his reading of the case. In what follows I shall briefly discuss two exceptions. But first to Freud himself.

Freud's central intention is expressed in the very title of his treatise: that of developing, by means of the Schreber case, a psychoanalytic theory of paranoia in general. At the heart of Freud's interpretation is the subject's defense against his own homosexual desires, which have been repressed, and which, owing to some external cause, reimpose themselves upon consciousness with renewed force. Insofar as the subject cannot or will not accept these wishes consciously (at the time of the Schreber treatise Freud had not yet conceptualized the superego), he must take recourse in various forms of defense, so as to make his own wishes unrecognizable as wishes. Freud describes these forms of defense as transformations of the sentence, "I (a man) love him": the various possible transpositions of subject, verb, and object generate the various forms of paranoia: delusions of persecution, erotomania, delusions of jealousy, and megalomania.³⁹

Applied to Schreber, the theory implies a fixation on the father and older brother, which is later transferred to Flechsig and to God. Of Schreber's two main fantasies, the first, transformation into a woman, is primarily (whereas the second, saving mankind through divine impregnation, is only secondarily) a rationalization or a compromise, designed to justify the (desired) sacrifice of masculinity.

"We find ourselves," says Freud, "on the familiar ground of the father-complex" or more precisely on that of the so-called negative Oedipus. The reasons for this negation are decisive, yet Freud mentions them only incidentally, as if in passing. Homosexual fixation, in his view, is not so much the cause of a psychic process as its result: an effect of an Oedipal conflict. Under threat of castration by the father, the child abandons the mother

as an object of love, but only in order to identify with her and assume her role. This, however, leaves the problem of castration largely unresolved, and indeed urgent, insofar as such identification with the mother—the archetype of being transformed into a woman—is, without castration, utterly unthinkable. Hence, whereas the threat of castration is repulsed by homosexuality—although not, of course, by homosexuality alone—at the same time it is also recognized, confirmed, and continually repeated. This process is what Freud elsewhere, in his essay on fetishism, calls “disavowal” (*Verleugnung*).⁴⁰

Various objections have been made to this reading of Freud, which reduces his essay on Schreber to a schematic statement and, as we shall see, in no way exhausts it. Ferenczi very cautiously raised the first objections; although he agreed with Freud that a relationship obtains between paranoia and homosexuality, he did not find this an adequate explanation. Ferenczi then remarked that this aspect failed to account sufficiently for the *specificity* of paranoia vis-à-vis homosexuality. The question remained: “What conditions have to be fulfilled for infantile bi- or ambisexuality to develop into either homosexual neurosis, or paranoia?”⁴¹

This question has been addressed by two of the few authors who have sought to adhere to psychoanalytic theory while still attempting to examine critically Freud’s Schreber interpretation: Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, who appended to their translation of the *Memoirs* into English their own thoughtful analysis. They turn the Freudian thesis around, asserting that what is primary is the fantasy not of emasculation but of the redeemer, a mythological-archaic (so-called heliolithic) fantasy of begetting that derives not from the Oedipus complex or from pre-Oedipal fixations, nor indeed from any sexual-genital source at all, but rather from an inborn, deeply felt wish to bring forth life and thereby overcome the limits of mortality. The weakness of such an interpretation—which owes more to Jung than to Freud—are, for Schreber’s text at least, self-evident and require no further discussion. Yet the “somatic hallucinations,” to which Macalpine and Hunter rightly call attention, are no better explained by being referred to a procreation fantasy than to a castration complex (in the strict sense). Even more serious is the fact that Macalpine and Hunter, no less than Schreber’s other psychoanalytic commentators, completely ignore the aspect of paranoid discourse emphasized by Freud: its tendency to dissem-

ble and distort. Thus, they base their arguments against the causality of castration, homosexuality, and so on, and in favor of the begetting fantasies, on a most unreliable witness: on Schreber himself or, rather, on his explicit statements, on what he *wants to say* (in distinction to what he actually *describes*). In their discussion we often read: “Schreber himself considered . . .” and “Schreber makes this point clear . . .” (*M*, p. 398); such appeals to authority only make clear how little Freud’s successors, whether orthodox or not, understand about the distorting intention of unconscious articulation, which, as in dreams, does not want to be understood and which *betrays itself* only as distortion.

Despite the shortcomings of an interpretation that would replace Freud’s thesis with one even less adequate—one which can explain psychic conflict only in terms of the frustration of childlessness—Macalpine and Hunter are able to point out weaknesses in the Freudian and above all post-Freudian readings insofar as they invoke the Oedipal relation too schematically. Macalpine and Hunter emphasize that in clinical practice with paranoids, as well as in Schreber’s case, the decisive point is not homosexuality as such but rather insecurity or confusion about one’s sexual identity. The sun, God’s main organ or instrument, is not simply a father, as Freud would have us believe, but equally “a whore” (“the sun is a whore,” Schreber bellows),⁴² and also “God”: “O damn, it is extremely hard to say that God allows himself to be . . .” (*M*, p. 159), the voices say. Macalpine and Hunter point to Schreber’s multiple interest in questions of origin, genealogy, and creation. Finally, they focus attention on his body fantasies (largely neglected by Freud) as a decisive element in Schreber’s delusional system.

There can be no doubt that such aspects must be included in any satisfactory interpretation of the *Memoirs*. It is equally clear that neither the thesis of repulsed homosexuality nor that of “heliolithic” fantasies of begetting is sufficient to do justice to the dynamics of Schreber’s text. The fact that Schreber’s most significant fantasies concern the *body* on the one hand, and *language* on the other; that body and language stand in the closest possible relation to each other; and, not least of all, that Schreber *writes*, that we are dealing here with a text which does not stand apart from what it describes, but which itself is included in it: none of this is taken into account, either by Freud or by Macalpine and Hunter. Only the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan

has made such questions the center of his interpretation. He was the first to redefine boldly Freud's conceptual apparatus as being of an inherently linguistic nature. Inasmuch as Lacan's reading of Schreber's *Memoirs* presupposes a certain familiarity with the linguistic Freud interpretation, we need to consider a basic outline of the latter before going any further.

In his "return to Freud" Lacan starts with the notion that the structure of Freud's concept of the unconscious—its radical heterogeneity—is determined by the structure of language. Lacan understands language in terms of the semiotics of the Geneva linguist and founder of "structuralist" linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure's fundamental insight is that language, like any system of symbols, can function only on the basis of *differences*. Thus in order to denote something, it is essential first of all that the carriers of meaning, called "signifiers," differ from each other: only insofar as they are disparate can they refer to a positive content, what Saussure calls the "signified."

Lacan uses this differential or "diacritical" theory of linguistic articulation to conceptualize the symbolization process of unconscious desire. Hence desire—which for Lacan as for Freud is essentially unconscious, whether as wish, drive, or "libido"—is characterized by the fact that its objects are not real objects, not "signifieds" (to use Saussure's terminology) identical with themselves, but rather "signifiers," that is, elements which refer to something else, not through their internal constitution but through their differential relations to other elements, which are equally "signifiers." On this view reality in the ordinary sense of the word is accessible to the subject *only as an aftereffect of a symbolization process*: disturbances in the process affect its relationship to reality. And this is precisely the case with Schreber. But how should this disturbance be thought of, and what are its consequences?

Certainly it should not be thought of in terms of the simple concept of *projection*: even Freud, who often uses the concept in his Schreber essay, corrects himself in the end: "It was incorrect to say that the perception which was suppressed internally is projected outwards; the truth is rather, as we now see, that what was abolished internally [*das innerliche Aufgehobene*] returns from without."⁴³ But *what* is it that is abolished, only to return from without, as reality? Freud's answer is unambiguous: "His father's most dreaded threat, castration, actually provided the ma-

terial for his wishful phantasy (at first resisted but later accepted) of being transformed into a woman."⁴⁴

According to Freud, *castration*—at least initially—forms the core of what has been "abolished internally" and "returns from without." Important is how one understands this castration: whether as a real fact of a real development, or as an aspect of a structure that manifests itself within the development, yet whose function transcends the development and organizes it. These two styles of thought—the genetic and the structural—are both found in Freud and are related to each other in somewhat the same manner as are the manifest and latent content of a dream. Against the tendency of many psychoanalysts to read Freud only genetically, and thereby to assimilate his thought to egopsychology (for the temporality and conceptual apparatus of the genetic perspective are inseparably linked to the primacy of the ego), Lacan tries to elaborate the primacy of the structural aspects in Freud.

One can particularize this issue in terms of Macalpine and Hunter's criticism of Freud's interpretation of Schreber's case. Freud, they claim, grasps the case exclusively in terms of the Oedipus complex, as a *sexual* problematic. Yet Macalpine and Hunter tacitly follow the psychoanalytic establishment they so severely criticize, insofar as they construe the Oedipal aspect to be a *genetic* category, from which the "Oedipal = genital = sexual" equation derives. Castration, they agree, is tied to a specific Oedipal = genital phase of development, whereas in Schreber's case much earlier and more archaic phases are decisive, phases in which castration and Oedipus have no place. Freud's procedure, however, militates in and of itself against any such schematization; he always approaches linear phenomena from a structural standpoint. Thus, in Schreber's case he considers the "fixation" on the phase of early (pregenital) narcissism to be motivated by the rejection of castration. Lacan argues that for Freud the Oedipal relation is never limited to a purely genetic phase, but rather determines the subject's entire development by providing the minimal symbolic structure that constitutes unconscious desire from the start.⁴⁵ How does this structure then come to prevail in the subject?

Lacan's answer is: by means of the "phallus," and of the "castration" that mediates it. Castration names the confrontation of the subject with the symbolic structure of its desire. As Freud

shows, the discovery that the mother lacks a penis marks the decisive moment when castration begins to affect the child: this discovery brings with it the certainty that something like not having a penis is possible as a permanent condition. More important, since the child assumes that everyone has a penis, he interprets the absence of the organ as implying the reality of castration. Castration is thereby regarded as a real possibility. Castration thereby transforms the object of desire into that which it has always already tended to be, although the subject only gradually develops an organ for it: into a *signifier*. For the phallus is neither something (the penis of the mother), nor is it simply *nothing* (the castration of the mother); rather, it marks the differential relationship making possible, and structuring, the articulation of gender identity. The phallus—for Lacan, the *signifier of desire as such*—signifies something that neither is, nor is not: it signifies a difference. Hence, what until now has appeared to be either real or purely psychic—castration, the phallus, and the Oedipal structure—reveals itself to be eminently *linguistic* within the individual subject's economy and history. Castration marks the subject's access to the differential-symbolic structure of articulated desire.

Yet the extent of this access depends, says Lacan, on another linguistic relationship: that of the subject to the "Name-of-the-Father" (*Nom-du-Père*). That castration and the father are connected is, of course, nothing new to psychoanalysis; new and significant is the attempt to understand this connection as an essentially symbolic one, that is, in the differential-dialectical sense (in sharp contrast to the traditional notion of symbol). The Name-of-the-Father can be no normal name: it was Saussure who emphasized that the function of language as a system of signification is to be distinguished from the operation of naming.⁴⁶ To the extent that the name emphasizes the identity with the named, Lacan's concept of the symbolic as a movement of differences generating identity (the signified) as its aftereffect has little to do with it. According to Lacan, what the Name-of-the-Father signifies is nothing other than the dead father, for only insofar as he is dead, can the father have an effect as a symbol. Lacan refers in this context to Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, which he considers to be a mythical reconstruction not of actual primal history but of symbolic necessity, a reconstruction that cannot be understood in terms of traditional logic: for the function of the father has a psychic effect precisely because a name can dis-

tinguish itself from the named and can therefore develop its symbolic power independently of the person who bears it.

According to Lacan, Schreber rejects or "forecloses" the Name-of-the-Father. In contrast to the normal process of repression—which on the one hand implies a kind of recognition or acknowledgment of the repressed as its precondition, and on the other hand entails the continual presence of the repressed as an unconscious cathexis—Lacan's concept of "foreclosure" (a translation of Freud's *Verwerfung*) seems to entail the "Aufhebung" Freud speaks of, the exclusion of something that returns from without, as reality. This *Aufhebung* as *Verwerfung* differs from repression in that it leaves no traces from which future symbolization could be structured, but simply a hole, a gap in the symbolic or, more precisely, a rent in the Symbolical.

Here I break off the discussion of Lacan without any excessive apologies for its distortions, which result both from the fragmentary, highly elliptical character of Lacan's discourse, as well as from the fact that a comprehensive description of Lacan's thought in this context is simply not possible.⁴⁷ Presupposing Lacanian theory as a working hypothesis, I shall in closing bring together certain aspects of the *Memoirs* having to do with the decisive relation between language and body. In this way I would like to indicate a direction for interpreting—in other words, a *manner of reading*—Schreber's text.

The Wondrous Wound, or, A Man Called Schneider

Schreber employs a simple "example" both to characterize compulsive thinking and to show how it not only misses its goal of destroying his mind, but brings about the exact opposite: "I meet a person I know by the name of Schneider. Seeing him the thought automatically arises 'This man's name is Schneider' or 'This is Mr. Schneider.' With it 'But why' or 'Why because also resounds in my nerves'" (*M*, pp. 179–180).

Normally, Schreber continues, one would consider such questions to be absurd and reject them with justified indignation: "What a silly question, the man's name is simply Schneider." Yet, "my nerves were unable or almost unable to behave like this . . . This very peculiar question 'why' occupies my nerves automatically—particularly if the question is repeated several times—until their thinking is diverted in another direction" (*M*, p. 180).

It is important to observe very carefully the nature of this

"diversion" of thought: "My nerves perhaps answer first: Well, the man's name is Schneider because the father was also called Schneider." But this answer, which traces the name's origin back to the father, is unsatisfactory: "This trivial answer does not really pacify my nerves. Another chain of thought starts about why giving of names was introduced at all among people, its various forms among different peoples at different times. . . . Thus an extremely simple observation under the pressure of compulsive thinking becomes the starting point of a very considerable mental task, usually not without bearing fruit" (*M*, p. 180).

One must not underestimate the significance of this "considerable mental task," generated as a by-product of compulsive thinking: it ultimately made possible Schreber's reconstruction of the Cosmic Order and of its crisis, as well as his composition of the *Memoirs*. The example alluded to is important not least of all for this reason. That it is not merely an arbitrary example—if such a thing is even possible—can be shown on a number of grounds. First, Schreber's concern with names is a very old one: his interest in "etymological questions" is, he says, stimulated particularly by compulsive thinking, which "has interested me in earlier days of health" (*M*, p. 179). Second, the names of his ancestors as well as those of Flechsig play a decisive role in his fantasy of soul murder: one notes formulations like "I presume that at one time a bearer of the name Flechsig—a human being carrying that name—succeeded in. . ." (*M*, p. 56); or that "the names of Flechsig and Schreber (probably not specifying any individual member of these families)" played "leading roles" (*M*, p. 54) in the soul murder. Even the theological implications of the Name-of-the-Father are present in Schreber's delirious genealogy (Paul Theodor Flechsig, Abraham Fürthegott Flechsig, and so on).⁴⁶ Finally, the entire Cosmic Order is constructed by means of (and is constituted as) a series of names that, to Schreber, prove the objectivity of his own experience, since he did not earlier know these names "themselves."

All this would suggest that Schreber's example of naming was no mere fortuitous idea. Let us therefore examine it somewhat more closely. Unfortunately Schreber does not elaborate on the "considerable mental task" involved in his thoughts on naming. We are provided with only two details: first, the man Schreber meets is already known to him; second, his name is "Schneider." Yet there is a third detail as well, if only a negative

one, one that has been disavowed: identifying the father as the origin of the name is, Schreber thinks, "trivial" and it does not "calm" his nerves, which search for the true "reason" that surely lies elsewhere. These are the elements of the example.

The fact that in our culture family names generally come from the father is something that Schreber considers trivial, something that hardly puts him at ease. The name itself suggests why this should be the case: the man named Schneider is so named not only because it was his father's name, or his grandfather's, or his great-grandfather's, but perhaps because an ancestor actually was a Schneider (a tailor). Or are we perhaps falling prey to the kind of compulsive thinking Schreber described?

Perhaps—except that a reading of the *Memoirs* reveals that tailors are at work everywhere: this is suggested first of all by the tear or rip in the Cosmic Order, but also by sentences that are only begun (*angeschnitten*, literally, cut into); by souls that are cut off (*abgeschnitten*, literally, cut up or away) from the total mass of divine nerves; by organs that are cut out (*herausgeschnitten*) and limbs that are dissected (*zerschnitten*). But above all, we are interested here in a different kind of cut, one discussed in the first postscript to the *Memoirs*, which concerns "miracles." Again, this is "a minor example" chosen by Schreber to "serve as proof" for the divine miracles being directed against him: "On 5th October 1900 while being shaved I received a small cut, which had quite frequently happened before. Walking through the garden afterwards I met the Government Assessor M.; he noted at once the inconspicuous little piece of sponge covering my cut (of about this size ○) and asked me about it; I told him truthfully, that the barber had cut me" (*M*, p. 219).

This is but a minor incident, certainly, yet for Schreber (and hence for us as well) "extremely interesting and instructive." What actually took place? Schreber is nicked by the barber, whom he takes to be merely a tool of God, who "acted on the muscles of the barber's hand to give it a rapid movement," causing the cut. Schreber attempts to protect and hide the wound with a small piece of sponge, which he also illustrates, life-size, in the text. But this attempt at concealment is in turn thwarted, again by God, and this immediately draws the attention of the Government Assessor M. to the small mark; the hidden wound is discovered and becomes the object of a conversation initiated by the question, "What is that on your mouth?" The conversation, Schreber continues, satisfies the vanity of the

rays, which—not unlike humans—are especially flattered when “recognition of their achievement or industry . . . is remarked on” (*M*, p. 219). Not much happens in this minor example, yet it may well be that the essential elements of Schreber’s phantasm are collected here. What are these elements, and what is their phantasmic structure?

First, there is God, the “cutter” (*Schneider*), who wounds Schreber. Second, Schreber attempts not only to protect the wound but, more important, to hide it with a small piece of sponge, which is *then seen* in place of the wound. This insignificant piece of sponge is seen by God and becomes the object of a conversation that pleases the rays, since they (or their works) are thus observed and respected. On the one hand the wound is protected and hidden, on the other it is seen and talked about as something that is hidden. It is seen and talked about, however, not only by the Government Assessor M., but also—and this is the crucial point—by Schreber himself, who makes this minor incident into the subject of his first postscript. He describes the scene and reveals its true meaning: he gives the wound its true name—which comprehends its apparent name, “wound” (*Wunde*)—and at the same time sublates it. For, as the voices proclaim in recognition of Schreber’s victory over God, “all nonsense cancels itself out.” Yet here nonsense signifies “wound,” and its sublation (*Wunder*) signifies “wonder” or “miracle.” Like the small circle that Schreber draws in his text—not entirely trusting in the power of words, of verbal description—by means of his explanation the wound is supposed to *close* and at the same time to *heal itself*, as a wonder.

In this (phantasmic) light, the question of the Government Assessor M. implies a kind of Having that in fact entails a violation of the very thing to be possessed, namely, the body (“What is that on your mouth?”), but that, as a *miracle*, indicates a real possession. For Schreber *has* those rays—that is, God himself—in his body, as female nerves of just radiating an irresistible attraction.

If it is thus the nature of miracles to destroy the body’s integrity—be it Schreber’s body or an inorganic one—then this integrity can be reestablished through a text that renames all *Wundern* to *Wunder* and reduces the latter to their cause, a text that ultimately consists in their absorption in Schreber’s body.

For this reason, the body constitutes the ultimate goal of the *Memoirs’* composition and publication. This “essay, which

seems to be growing to the size of a scientific work” (*M*, p. 123), will be published solely in the belief that it “would be of value both for science and the knowledge of religious truths” (*M*, p. 31); this *scientific* work has no other goal than to proffer its author’s body—in its altered form, saturated with female nerves of just—as an object of viewing: “I can do no more than offer my person as object of scientific observation for the judgment of experts. My main motive in publishing this book is to invite this” (*M*, p. 251).

Should this observation and judgment not be possible within his lifetime, Schreber hopes “that at some future time such peculiarities of my nervous system will be discovered by dissection of my body, which will provide stringent proof” (*M*, p. 251).

What Schreber would like to see established is the fact that he holds God within his body, that the *Wunde* of castration—which is not, and yet which is not nothing, insofar as it allows gender difference to articulate itself—has corporeal existence as a *Wunder*. Schreber’s text attempts to control this difference, which structures both language and the subject (as a sexual being), by making the difference *visible*, so as to repeat and reverse the moment—the “apparition,” as the voices say—when castration was discovered. Whereas as a woman Schreber is unmanned, he nonetheless *has it in him*: and like a woman, he can hope to be what he (no longer) *has*.

This is not only represented, it is linguistically distorted. The canceling out of nonsense—of that difference which, according to Saussure, makes possible language as well as the meaning it signifies—is followed by the return of the names, from without, announced by voices which still carry within them that rejected or foreclosed difference. Thus the cut leaves its traces in the “overlapping” (*Überschneidung*, literally, “over-cutting”) of wound and wonder; and in Schreber’s firm belief (*Überzeugung*, literally, “over-begetting”) in a divine “spontaneous generation,”⁴⁹ one without difference and prior to all distinction (prior to all castration); and in many other examples whose play can only be considered exemplary.

But since his language seeks to dissolve into something seen, into an “apparition,” I will close with an *image* that perhaps describes most clearly the movement and aspiration of the *Memoirs*. In the postscript concerning “hallucinations,” Schreber renders the rays as he “can see them *only* with my mind’s eye” (*M*, p. 227): “The filaments aiming at my head and apparently originating from the sun or other distant stars do *not* come to-

wards me in a straight line but in a kind of circle or parabola, similar perhaps to the way the chariots in the games of the old Romans drove round the *Meta*, or a special variety of skittles where the ball fastened to a string is first thrown around a post before it strikes the ninepins" (*M*, p. 228).

The rays, instead of coming at him directly, take a detour, just as, during the tournament, the Roman chariots of war drove around the *meta*. The *meta* were columns at the upper and lower end of the Roman circus around which the racers had to drive seven times. Schreber's *Memoirs* are the parable of this parabola whose course runs seven times around a divided middle before disappearing into it.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Franz Baumeayer, "Der Fall Schreber," *Psyche* 9 (1955-56): 536.
2. D. G. M. Schreber, *Das Pangenestikon* (Leipzig, 1860), p. 2.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
4. *Ibid.*, p. vi.
5. Alfons Ritter, *Schreber, das Bildungssystem eines Arztes* (Ph.D. diss., University of Erlangen, 1936), p. 19.
6. Baumeayer, "Der Fall Schreber," p. 515.
7. Quoted in William G. Niederland, "Schrebers 'angewandte' Kindheitswelt," *Psyche* 22, no. 3 (1966): 200; trans. Benjamin Gregg. Niederland's analyses of D. G. M. Schreber's writings reveal the extent to which the father's text furnished the material for the son's delusional ideas. The voices' language is derived often literally from that of the father, while the orthopedic apparatus invented by the father recur in the son's book as a "head-compression machine" or as the "compression-of-the-chest miracle."
8. See references to the "bellowing miracle," in Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, trans. Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 105 and passim. *Memoirs* hereafter cited as *M*.
9. See, however, Han Israels, *Schreber, Father and Son* (Amsterdam: Han Israels, 1981), for the most complete biographical study to date of the two Schrebers.
10. Quoted in Baumeayer, "Der Fall Schreber," p. 515.
11. See also his translation from the French: *Abhandlung von dem wahren Sitze des Rotzes* [*Treatise on the True Seat of Nasal Mucus*] (Leipzig, n.d.). Perhaps the following reference will suffice to indicate Daniel Paul Schreber's heartfelt if strained relationship to his ancestors: to demonstrate the senselessness of the divine "miracle," Schreber mentions "miracles . . . used to create new lower animals" and insects, but adds: "all to no purpose whatsoever, as . . . the newly created insects belong to a species which in any case already exists in vast numbers, so that there is no need to call them into life afresh" (*M*, p. 196). *Novae Species Insectorum* by Johann Christian Daniel Schreber (a great uncle) appeared in 1759.
12. Quoted in Baumeayer, "Der Fall Schreber," p. 514.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 519-520.
15. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, pt. 2 Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), pp. 615ff. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984).
16. Exemplary for this type of nonreading is the book by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *L'Anti-Œdipe* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972), pp. 18-26, 66-67, and passim (*Anti-Œdipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983; pp. 12-19, 56-57).
17. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller and J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 18. Translation emended by Benjamin Gregg: *Sinnlichkeit* ("sense experience") is translated by Miller as "sensibility," and *sowohl des Ausgangs als der Rückkehr* ("departure and return") as "starting and stopping."
18. Sigmund Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., ed. James Strachey, trans. Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud and assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-1974), vol. 12, pp. 17-18.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 37, n. 1.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
24. Sigmund Freud, "Moses and Monotheism," in *Standard Edition*, vol. 23, p. 43.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
26. "Indeed, dreams are so closely related to linguistic expression that Ferenczi has truly remarked that every tongue has its own dream-language. It is impossible as a rule to translate a dream into a foreign language. . . ." (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *Standard Edition*, vol. 4, p. 99, n. 1). Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 196–231.
27. This and all subsequent quotations in this section are from Baumeyer, "Der Fall Schreber," pp. 515–518.
28. *Welordnung*, translated by Macalpine and Hunter as "Order of the World"—Gregg's note.
29. *Verstandesnerren*, translated by Macalpine and Hunter as "nerves of intellect" (*M*, p. 45)—Gregg's note.
30. See Georges Bataille, *La part mandie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967). On the concept of "restricted economy," see also Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy," in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, pp. 251–277. Here an interpretation remains to be made which would reveal the social mediation of Schreber's delusional system not only in the sense of shared notions, but as a structuring factor. One would have to investigate especially the heightened problematic of identity of a (double) God who appears on the one hand as a transcendental Creator, and on the other as a limited subject, the phantasmal presentation of the bourgeois individual.
31. *Nervenhang*, translated by Macalpine and Hunter as "nerve-contact."
32. Compare this formulation with the subtitle of a book by Schreber's father: *Anthropos: The Structural Wonder of the Human Organism*. No wonder, then, that Schreber remarks in a footnote that, once again, this is "an expression which I did not invent. I would have ['hätte,' translated by Macalpine and Hunter as "had"—Gregg's note] spoken," he continues, "of [a] miraculous organization. . . ." (*M*, p. 54).
33. Regarding the Schreber Family's title—the "Margraves of Tuscany and Tasmania"—see Niederland, "Schreibers 'angewanderte' Kindheitswelt," pp. 216ff.
34. See William G. Niederland, "Three Notes on the Schreber Case," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 20 (1951): 579–591.
35. *Widerstzete*, translated by Macalpine and Hunter as "may have resisted"—Gregg's note.
36. And, according to Freud and Bataille, not for Schreber's nerves!
37. *M*, p. 175, n. 96. The function of spoken language in the constitution and preservation of identity becomes quite clear here: it is no accident that in Schreber's book, that which is heterogeneous and foreign to the ego makes use of written language—the system of notation—as an instrument (which is dead, automatic, and mindless) against the desire and power of Schreber's nerves. On the general problematic of the priority of phonetic language in Western thought, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).
38. In addition to Baumeyer, "Der Fall Schreber," see also Franz Baumeyer, "Noch ein Nachtrag zu Freuds Arbeit über Schreber," *Zeitschrift für Psychosomatische Medizin* 16 (1970): 243–245; William G. Niederland, *The Schreber Case: Psychoanalytic Profile of a Paranoid Personality* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1974). The non-psychoanalytic investigations of Han Israels, *Schreber, Father and Son*, should also be mentioned here.
39. See Freud, "Case of Paranoia," pp. 63ff.
40. Freud, "Fetishism," in, *Standard Edition*, vol. 21.
41. Sandor Ferenczi, "On the Part Played by Homosexuality in the Pathogenesis of Paranoia," in, Ferenczi and Otto Rank, *Sex in Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Ernest Jones (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 156; translation emended by Benjamin Gregg.
42. *M*, p. 270. It should be noted that Schreber does not himself record these (his own) expressions; they are mentioned solely in Dr. Weber's court-ordered medical opinion.
43. Freud, "Case of Paranoia," p. 71.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
45. In this context one should refer to Melanie Klein, who thought she had traced the beginnings of the triadic,

Oedipal relation to earliest childhood. See the essays collected in Klein, *The Psychoanalysis of Children* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1969).

46. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).
47. See Jacques Lacan, "On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," in Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977). See also Samuel Weber, *Rückkehr zu Freud: Jacques Lacans Ent-Stellung der Psychoanalyse* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1978). An English translation, *Return to Freud*, trans. Michael Levine, is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.
48. Cf. Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 580.
49. See *M*, p. 191: "In the previous chapter I expressed my opinion that *spontaneous generation* (parentless generation) does actually occur"; that Schreber would very much have liked to have stood *above all begetting* on the strength of his *convictions* can at least be surmised.