

# THE PUSH-TO-THE-WOMAN

*Dominique Laurent*

## The Push-to-the-Woman: From Structure to Logic

**T**he “push-to-the-woman” is an expression used by Lacan in “L’étourdit” in 1972, in relation to the Schreber case, which he had clarified and theorized at length between the end of 1957 and the start of 1958 in his “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis.” In the text, published in 1959, there is no question of a push-to-the-woman. Lacan rationalizes Schreber’s transformation into a woman by redefining the Oedipus complex through foreclosure. When he introduces the push-to-the-woman, this formula is accompanied by the formulas of sexuation where it is written: “~~The~~ woman does not exist.” What is this push towards that which does not exist? It is a matter of taking up these developments and examining the current uses that we can make of the formulation.

---

Dominique Laurent is an Analyst Member of the School, a member of the ECF and WAP. She practices psychoanalysis in Paris.

## On the Dissolution of the Imaginary Identification with Being the Woman

Eight years after his first illness, shortly after learning of his nomination as President of the Court of Appeal, all sorts of dreams agitate Schreber's nights. One morning the hypnopompic idea arises "that it really must be rather pleasant to be a woman succumbing to intercourse."<sup>1</sup> He points out that this "idea was so foreign to [his] whole nature" that if it had come to his full consciousness he would have rejected it with indignation. His assumption of the position is accompanied by insomnia, kinaesthetic and auditory phenomena, a sensation of imminent death and suicidal ideation, punctuated by several suicide attempts. Lacan underlines the first of the series occurring at his mother's home as a witness to the dissolution of the identification by which he had assumed the mother's desire until then.<sup>2</sup> He adds that "[d]ivination by the unconscious no doubt warned the subject very early on that, unable to be the phallus the mother is missing, there remained the solution of being the woman that men are missing."<sup>3</sup>

## The Soul without the Organ

In February 1894, the connection of the nerves takes place, the Other speaks to him. The fault that upends the order of Schreber's universe introduces the possibility of making oneself master of the soul of a living man in order to enjoy it through a connection of divine nerves. Schreber is now dealing with an Other of the message and with the jouissance that ravages his body. This is the moment when "the fleeting-improvised-men," appear, the first of which seems to be that of his wife.<sup>4</sup> Correlatively to the triggering of the "nerve-language," a meaning is imposed.<sup>5</sup> Schreber becomes the object of a plot to deliver him—body and soul—to a man, Flechsig. According to a plan that will become divine, his soul is abandoned to him and his body, changed into a woman's body, is to be handed over for sexual misuse and then simply "left to rot," presumably abandoned to putrefaction.<sup>6</sup> As he was writing his *Memoirs*, it occurred to him that the divine plan was "to commit soul

murder on me, and to hand over my body in the manner of a female harlot."<sup>7</sup> These ravages will take on a terrifying and deadly aspect as long as Schreber's position of indignation towards the project of *Entmannung* (unmanning/emas-culation) persists. The threat of unmanning concerns the being of the subject as doomed to be woman. In *Encore*, taking up the Aristotelian perspective, Lacan specifies that "the soul is nothing other than the supposed identicalness (*identité*) of this body to everything people think in order to explain it..."<sup>8</sup> Unmanning does not connote castration, but its very defect.

## The Death of the Subject

This ravage is such that at one point in mid-March 1894, the vital feeling of existence is radically altered. Lacan isolates it under the term "death of the subject." Schreber refers to it as "soul murder" or "the abduction of the soul."<sup>9</sup> During a time when "the subject was dead," Schreber, who describes himself as "a leper corpse leading another leper corpse,"<sup>10</sup> appears only in a relation to his specular double marked by death, which Lacan describes in 1958 as "topographical [...] regression—to the mirror stage, [...] reduced here to its mortal impact."<sup>11</sup> For Lacan, this is "a disturbance that occurred at the inmost juncture of the subject's sense of life,"<sup>12</sup> an effect of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father and the hole in phallic signification. The phallus in contact with the subject of the fundamentally dead signifier, is what the living function is grafted onto. The *soul murder* or the *abduction of the soul* is the abduction of the Other from language, the latter becoming entirely external to it and subordinated in the delirium to the real existence of the divine Other. This abduction is accomplished in a transformation of language itself, into "the basic-language [*la langue de fond*]."<sup>13</sup> Schreber's language really has become the language of the Other and its signified is that of the Other as such, as J.-A. Miller has commented.<sup>14</sup> This is the moment when the symbolic has become entirely real, and signifiers the vehicle of the jouissance of the Other.

7. *Ibid.*, 66.

8. Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (London: Norton, 1998), 110.

9. Daniel Paul Schreber, *op. cit.*, 34. Translation modified by the author.

10. *Ibid.*, 94. Translation modified by the author.

11. Jacques Lacan, "On a Question," *op. cit.*, 473.

12. *Ibid.*, 466.

13. Daniel Paul Schreber, *op. cit.*, 26.

14. Jacques-Alain Miller, *Du symptôme au fantasme et retour*, 1982–1983, *L'orientation lacanienne* (annual course delivered within the framework of the Department of Psychoanalysis, The University of Paris VIII, lesson of December 1, 1982).

1. Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, trans. Ida McAlpine and Richard A. Hunter (New York: New York Review of Books, 2000), 46.

2. Jacques Lacan, "On a Question Prior to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (London: Norton, 2006), 472.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Daniel Paul Schreber, *op. cit.*, 18.

5. *Ibid.*, 54.

6. *Ibid.*, 63.

## From *Entmannung* to Woman

Lacan considers the death of the subject “the true reason for the reversal in Schreber’s sense of indignation”<sup>15</sup> towards the *Entmannung* project. When the connection with God is re-established after he is left in the lurch, the feminine voluptuousness, the voluptuousness of the soul, invades him and is accompanied by his consent to his transformation into a woman. He and the World are revitalized.<sup>16</sup> This effort to respond constitutes the effort to re-appropriate a language that has become completely external to him, linked to an infinite jouissance. By maintaining himself as the subject of the signifier, he will find, by becoming the woman of God, a signifying solution that will be a substitute-metaphor. This consent is a vital necessity. The transformation into woman, from the voluptuousness he experiences, is the correlate of soul murder. There is a shift from outraged refusal of what he feels is an ignominious forcing towards woman, which comes to him from the Other, to a magnified acceptance:

I could see beyond doubt that the Order of the World imperiously demanded my unmanning, whether I personally liked it or not, and that therefore it was common sense that nothing was left to me but to reconcile myself to the thought [...] Nothing of course could be envisaged as a further consequence of unmanning but fertilization by [the] divine rays for the purpose of creating new human beings.<sup>17</sup>

With Schreber, Lacan puts the developments of the phallic dialectic to the test in psychosis. When the paternal metaphor does not function, phallic signification is not established. The phallic dialectic then functions with a real negativization of the organ. As the *Entmannung*—the loss of the organ—progresses, Schreber becomes a woman, a real realization of the equivalence girl–phallus. We pass from phallic meaning to the woman. Having become woman, he speaks the language of God, which is that of jouissance.

## Unlimited Jouissance and the Living

The woman that Schreber becomes is distinguished by characteristics of jouissance, a jouissance that is inscribed on the feminine side since it is not localized on an organ. “[T]hat my whole body is filled with nerves of voluptuousness from the top of my head to the soles of my feet, such as is

15. Jacques Lacan, “On a Question,” *op. cit.*, 473.

16. See Schreber, *op. cit.*, 254–5.

17. *Ibid.*, 164.

the case only in the adult female body.”<sup>18</sup> She must embody, he says, the exception of a voluptuousness without limit. The formula of the bond that unites Schreber to his Other seems to be: God enjoys of him [*le jouit*] as his woman. “God demands a state of constant jouissance [...] It is my duty to provide Him with it...”<sup>19</sup> It is God, that is to say language, that takes charge of the entirety of the jouissance, freed from the obstacle of the organ. The regulation of jouissance is localized in a transsexual scenario. Schreber in front of his mirror bears witness to a jouissance that, as a result of having to find a way to register itself as feminine, is henceforth tied to the image and to the scopophilic drive: “That anybody who sees me standing in front of a mirror with the upper part of my body naked would get the undoubted impression of a female trunk—especially when the illusion is strengthened by some feminine adornments. . . . [S]imilar phenomena have never previously been observed on a male body.”<sup>20</sup> “I have to imagine myself as man and woman in one person having intercourse with myself, or somehow have to achieve with myself a certain sexual excitement.”<sup>21</sup> This autoerotic jouissance is also an invention of sexual jouissance as such. Schreber is dealing with two bodies.<sup>22</sup>

## Transformation into a Woman and Gender Choice

Schreber is destined to become a woman for the enjoyment of the divine Other. This is only accomplished after the death of the subject. In contrast, when Lacan writes the formulas of sexuation, he insists on the subject’s choice of sex. The subject is free, he says, whatever his anatomy and civil status, to choose one side or the other.<sup>23</sup> It is a choice of jouissance and not of anatomy. This choice is not possible for Schreber. First there is refusal, then consent. He consents because his survival is at stake. God, equivalent to language, becomes an instrument of jouissance separated from phallic signification, from minus phi. He is destined to become a woman, but this does not mean being a woman. Once Schreber “has completed his transformation into a woman, the act of divine fecundation will assuredly take place [...] a sort of redemption [that] aims only at the creature of the future,”<sup>24</sup> says Lacan. It is a captivation towards this position that obeys a structural constraint. Schreber dedicates himself to creating the signifier of The Woman and to obtaining the inclusion

18. *Ibid.*, 243.

19. *Ibid.*, 250.

20. *Ibid.*, 248.

21. *Ibid.*, 250.

22. François Leguil, “Les deux corps du pousse à la femme,” *Ornicar?*, no. 52 (November 2018): 108.

23. Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, *op. cit.*, 71–3.

24. Jacques Lacan, “On a Question,” *op. cit.*, 475.

of this foreclosed signifier in the field of the Other. With the feminine real effect that occurs, Schreber fabricates a relative stabilization without the Name-of-the-Father. We witness a point of arrest in the development of the delirium, and a certain encoding of jouissance. It is also the re-establishment of a relation to reality that henceforth becomes livable, and a certain pacification of the relation to the Other. Lacan does not speak of a cure.<sup>25</sup> In the terms of the first paternal metaphor: the mother, as the locus of primordial drive jouissance not symbolized by the phallic signifier, bears witness to a desire that escapes minus phi. What remains is the demand of God, in other words language. To identify with the woman is to identify with the beyond of the phallus, with the Other jouissance of the woman that is the mother, elevating her to The Woman. The elucidation of Schreber's position allows Lacan to go further and move on to the real dialectic of being and having.

### From Real Dialectics to Logic

In "L'étourdit," in 1972, Lacan introduces the term "push-to-the-woman" in relation to Schreber's psychosis, bringing it closer to the formulas of female sexuation.<sup>26</sup> The foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, or, if one prefers, the non-existence of the paternal exception in psychosis, is put into tension with the first quantifier: there is no  $x$  such that  $\phi$  of  $x$  is negated. In *Encore*,  $\Phi$  designates the phallus, as "the signifier that has no signified, the one that is based, in the case of man, on phallic jouissance."<sup>27</sup> It has no signified, but indexes a jouissance. The quantifier reminds us that there is no belief on the feminine side in a subject that says no to the phallic function—that is, to castration—since women are already castrated, in contrast to men who believe in the threat of castration. This threat comes from the first quantifier on the male side: "There exists an  $x$  such that  $\phi$  of  $x$  is negated." Lacan calls this "the function of the father"<sup>28</sup> whereby "the *non phi of x* as negated [ $x$ ] founds the exercise [operability] of that which—through castration—deputizes for the sexual relation which cannot be written."<sup>29</sup> The first propositional formula on the feminine side has as its correlate a without-limit. The foreclosure would thus lead the psychotic subject to the feminine side.<sup>30</sup> The push-to-the-woman, a logical reformulation of *the woman that all men lack*, indicates by its structure of exception the stabilizing function that it carries. This logical

structure that identifies a jouissance with a name that is not the Name-of-the-Father would thus align with the uniqueness or incomparability of being evoked by the other quantifier proposed by Lacan: the *not-all* in the phallic function. This means that there is no regimen of universality, whether or not the subject inscribes himself in the phallic function.

The effect of the push-to-the-woman as elaborated from the first quantifier is a function without limit that can develop in a hyperbolic manner. Hyperbolic is to be understood as asymptotic as Lacan introduced it in relation to Schreber; a function that tends towards a limit at infinity but can never reach it. In "L'étourdit," Lacan reminds us that the push-to-the-woman is "the sardonic precipitation of an effect felt as a forcing," caused by the irruption of the One-father. Lacan had referred to this as early as 1958's "On a Question" in terms of the moment of the triggering of the psychosis. It is enough that One-father, nothing other than a real father, not necessarily the subject's father, "situate himself in a tertiary position in any relationship that has as its base the imaginary couple  $a - a$ ."<sup>31</sup> One-father comes to this place where the foreclosed Name-of-the-Father could never be summoned. One-father, qualified in "L'étourdit" as "without reason," connotes the without-limit of the effects of his irruption due to the foreclosure. This passage from "L'étourdit" on "sardonic precipitation" is an ironic writing of the paternal metaphor. Instead of guaranteeing phallic signification, the mask of the One-father comes—in a sardonic way—to ensure the push-to-jouissance marked by the push-to-the-woman. In the place of minus phi there is a non-negativisable  $\Phi$ . A question arises: in what way is the so-called supplementary feminine jouissance—apart from the character of *without-limit*—of the same nature as that actually provoked by the divine rays? In short, it should be possible to distinguish feminine jouissance beyond the phallus from hallucinatory jouissance. Schreber calls it feminine and limitless, but it remains hallucinatory nevertheless. On the other hand, "Woman has a relation with  $S(A)$ , and it is already in that respect that she is split/doubled, that she is not-all, since she can also have a relation with  $\Phi$ ."<sup>32</sup>

### Obstacles to the Push-to-the-Woman?

What contemporary use can we make of the formula of the push-to-the-woman? Can we apply it to the Trans equation or not? Since Woman does

25. Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (London: Norton, 1993), 86.

26. Jacques Lacan, "L'étourdit," *Autres Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 466.

27. Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, *op. cit.*, 81.

28. *Ibid.*, 74.

29. *Ibid.*, 79. Translation modified by the author.

30. Anaëlle Lebovits-Quenehen, "Du pousse à la femme," *La Cause du désir*, no. 103. The commentary on this passage from "L'étourdit" resonates with the articles by François Leguil, F. Schreiber, and Jean-Claude Maleval in *La lettre mensuelle*, no. 114 (December 1992): 10–12.

31. Jacques Lacan, "On a Question," *op. cit.*, 481.

32. Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, *op. cit.*, 81.

not exist, is it applicable to the two sides of sexuation? The extension to the male side would suppose contemporary clinical tableaux, but these do not present to the same extent and richness as that of Schreber. The influence of drugs in the reduction of hallucinatory phenomena is certainly one reason for this. On the other hand, the extension of the use of the formula on the female side raises other questions, as noted by François Leguil—for whom the use of the formula should be reserved for a male subject.<sup>33</sup> The push-to-the-woman would designate the *going after men* of a certain number of psychotic female subjects. These subjects would thus fit into the logical structure of “the woman who is lacking for all men.” In my experience, the “going after men” that I was able to observe never took on the insignia of jouissance, of love, of a forcing of a real Other in his will to enjoy, of a delusional construction of any kind, even less of a death of the subject. These transitory solutions appeared rather as a desperate attempt to fight against death. These were subjects who sought in the gaze of men, anonymous or otherwise, the sign of a desire that made them alive, engulfed as they were in a mortifying void. But this ephemeral solution regularly ended in the massive intake of toxic substances in which they were annihilated. Here we are not in a push-to-the-woman situation that would ensure a kind of more vital stabilization, but in a twilight world.

Can we extend the formula to subjects who claim to feel a feminization within them or, on the contrary, refuse it? This complex register lends itself to all sorts of confusion, from the transsexual problem to feminization on a certain homosexual incline. The transsexual is a prisoner of a body that does not correspond to his sexual being. And this is a certainty. The suffering he experiences leads him to ask for his anatomical rectification and the recognition of his transformation by the law. In no case does he experience the forcing to which Schreber is subjected in his transformation. If there is any forcing, it would be that of a structural constraint of the Other of the language rather than any delusion. The x of the mother’s desire in the terms of “On a Question,” outside of any phallic meaning, is counteracted by the gender color of girl or boy. Contemporarily, it is rather s/he who forces the other to accept his demand for transformation. We have seen in recent times how this request from children or adolescents, classified as gender dysphoria, is now received and treated.

It seems to me that the formula of the push-to-the-woman, so admirably described by Lacan on the basis of the Schreber case, is to be handled on a case-by-case basis. The phenomenology of any behavior does not automatically deliver the logical function to which it belongs. To hastily generalize its use obscures more than it illuminates.

*Translated by Raphael Montague*

33. François Leguil, “Les deux corps du pousse à la femme,” *Ornicar?*, no. 52 (November 2018): 106.

# The Lacanian Review

Journal of the  
New Lacanian School  
and the World  
Association of  
Psychoanalysis

ISSUE 13 / FALL

~~THE~~ WOMAN

# CONTENTS

## EDITORIAL

- 11 Cyrus Saint Amand Poliakoff, *She*

## RAVISHMENT

- 16 Jacques Lacan, *Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras du ravissement de Lol V. Stein*  
17 Jacques Lacan, *Hommage Done to Marguerite Duras, for the Ravishment of Lol V. Stein*  
30 Marcus André Vieira, *Love and Ravage*

## PSYCHOANALYSIS & THE FEMININE POSITION

- 40 Jacques-Alain Miller, *Des femmes et des semblants*  
41 Jacques-Alain Miller, *Of Women and Semblants*

## MASKS & INVENTIONS

- 69 Christiane Alberti, *Introduction to "The Woman Does Not Exist"*  
73 Dominique Laurent, *The Push-to-the-Woman*  
81 Ana Viganó, *A Frida Solution: Writing with the Eyes*

## THIRD THREAD

- 91 Robert Buck, *Of Her Own Making: A Conversation with Lynne Cooke*

## SHE?

- 103 Roger Litten, *Bodies Captured by Discourse*  
111 Zoe Strimpel, *The Word "Woman"*  
108 Raquel Cors, *A Hole That Allows Breathing*  
120 Éric Laurent, *Laughing at Norms*

## UNTRANSLATABLE

- 127 Clémentine Bénard, *Courtly Love*  
131 Sarah Birgani, *Poetic of the Feminine*  
135 Norbert Leber, *Die Unerkennung*  
140 Marie-Hélène Brousse, *A Barre Over the Discourse of Psychoanalysis*

## THE FEMINIST DOES NOT EXIST

- 147 Deborah Gutermann-Jacquet, *Bodies: The Return*  
154 Philip Dravers, *The Witches of Macbeth*

## COVER

- 169 Robert Buck, *No Cover*