

SOME CASES OF ORDINARY PSYCHOSIS IN THE CPCT OF BARCELONA

Antoni Vicens

The work we do in the CPCT, of offering free treatment of sixteen sessions (once renewable), opens a new dimension in the field of applied psychoanalysis. Jacques Lacan, in his time, distinguished between pure and applied analysis. The meaning of 'pure' and 'applied' is that in the latter we use a part of the acquisitions of the former, with a view to getting a result, even a cure. In the field of psychotherapy the results are supposedly predictable. Psychoanalysis introduces the absolute unpredictability of the results. In the CPCT we apply psychoanalysis, but in a way that elevates applied psychoanalysis to the level of pure psychoanalysis. It is pure psychoanalysis then that takes some lessons from applied psychoanalysis. To this extent, we begin to doubt the meaning of these two opposing terms.

All kinds of psychoanalytic clinics – the one in our private consultation and the one in the CPCT – aim at the transmission of psychoanalysis. Freud knew very well, and he taught us, that psychoanalysis is not transmitted by way of therapeutic formulae. In such and such situation you have to proceed in this a way, and you will obtain that result. The transmission of psychoanalysis is equivalent to the renewal of its practice. We need to regularly question the foundations of psychoanalysis, as difficult as that may seem. The CPCT is such a question for psychoanalysis and its role in our time.

One thing is certain: there is a difference in the lengths given to the treatment. In the CPCT, time is restricted to sixteen sessions and the patient does not pay for the treatment.

The fact that the treatment is free puts us on the margins of the market of mental health – a market that invades our life and our expectations more and more. Any activity subjected to the laws of the market becomes anonymous, both for the patient and the analyst. For the

laws of the market everything is replaceable and identical to another similar product. What we need to promote instead, is the encounter between a symptom and an analyst (who is perhaps another sort of symptom), which is always new and always original. Jouissance cannot be approached in the same way as the objects of science: jouissance has its own laws. What we want, is to read the text of these laws and not to calculate the probabilities it has to conform to, according to a standard of jouissance established elsewhere. Jouissance in itself follows its own movement in history, regardless of the scientific, the universal, or the university approaches. I think it is this that has brought Jacques-Alain Miller to speak of liquid psychoanalysis. In our time, jouissance is not contained in fixed pigeonholes; it leaks, it flows, it invades, it permeates and it oozes, in a world without memory.

Our clinic, in the CPCT and in general, does not consist in establishing causal connections and investigating who committed the causal sin of the neurosis, be it the father, the mother, king Oedipus, the primal father, Moses, or any other. We hold the subject responsible. And this responsibility is present, it is not one that diverts us to a kind of guilt. Guilt always refers back to an infinite point of fatherhood.

Our position comes from the conviction that in the one hundred years of psychoanalytic clinical practice, a certain amount of knowledge has been incorporated into the knowledge of the analyst, and also in common knowledge. I think psychoanalysis is nowadays the field most in tune and most interested in the reading of classical psychiatry, which made its observations without the veil of medication. We also have become more familiarised with psychosis, be it within literature, theatre or cinema, in which the world of psychotics is shown to be the very world we live in. A psychotic subject in society is not only displayed in acts of criminal transgression such as serial killings, sniper shootings or global terrorism. Nor, only as an artist, who contains his psychosis with the aura of geniality (see Jaspers on Hölderlin, Van Gogh, Strindberg and others). A politician too can be psychotic, for better or worse (as in the case of president Wilson, analysed by Freud and Bullitt).

So our work is not a sort of focus oriented psychotherapy. We cannot reduce our observations to a limited scope and restricted span of activity of the patient, ignoring what is truly central and important,

namely the ex-sistence of the subject, which is to say, his dependence on a lack of signification in the field of language. The Other has a hole. It is not that the Other lacks something that could be replaced, rather, there is a place where the Other does not exist and therefore cannot cause anything in the subject nor be sutured in any therapy. There is no case in which we could speak of normality, whatever sense we give to that word. We don't live in a world organised around the fault or defect of something that should be there. It is a world that is not One, with no hope of a One where all is in place, or of being this One. So we listen in each analysand, to the way he or she has managed to live with his or her resources. These resources stem from the constellation of his or her birth, the contingency of what he or she has encountered in the course of his or her life, the traces his or her jouissance has written. In his conference in Baltimore (1966), Jacques Lacan said about the course of life that it "is something which goes, as we say in French, *à la dérive*"¹ [adrift – close to the Freudian *drive*, the English term Lacan proposed]. Life goes down a river, from time to time touching on a bank, staying here and there for a while, without understanding anything. What we can offer in an applied psychoanalysis is to read this course of life as a text and to find out which true encounters have written that text. What the psychoanalyst is able to produce here is the emptiness of the background of this text. It is not the background of a picture or backstage of a theatrical scene. This background has no existence at all; we can only refer to it after the trace has shown itself. The trace that jouissance leaves in life gives existence to the emptiness that we can then consider as the white surface on which writing is drawn, or the silence, where the voice is heard. You can read in a paper by Eric Laurent² in the volume *The Later Lacan* edited by Véronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf, how Jacques Lacan extracted this logic from the art of Chinese calligraphy. The writer puts himself in the position of the creator of the world, but in the sense that when he lets the pencil touch the paper, this paper becomes the emptiness as such. The writer creates the emptiness.

¹ Lacan, J.; 'On Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever' in Macksey, R. and Donato, E. (eds.); *The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, John Hopkins Press, London 1970 pp.186-195

² Laurent, E.; 'The Tao of the Psychoanalyst' in Voruz, V. And Wolf, B.; *The Later Lacan: An Introduction*, State University of New York Press, 2007 pp.25-52

It is hence with the symptom that we read; not as in the epic poem where we listen with the gravity of a participant at a ceremony, where things that existed since the beginning of time find their symbolic permanence. Lévi-Strauss read the myth of Oedipus as a structuralist, decomposing it into *mythemes*, that is to say, studying the different compositions of the elements that are at stake for each moment of the tragedy. This point of view is the one of a logician, someone who can keep himself at a distance from the tragedy, as if he himself had no father, no mother and no siblings, but a perfect mathematician who lives in a timeless world. We have to go beyond that. We are interested in the absence where all these presences take the symbolic value of a destiny.

The concrete basis of the clinic of ordinary psychosis is the existence of an ordinary paranoia. In Seminar XXIII, *Le Sinthome*, Jacques Lacan returns to his doctoral thesis, *On the Paranoid Psychosis...* the title goes on saying, *...and its Relationship to Personality*. Years after his thesis, Lacan spoke of personality as paranoia itself, a normal paranoia of sorts. The case of Joyce pushes Lacan to see this paranoia as reality in itself, as being different to the real, in the sense that Lacan seeks to give to this register.

The name 'ordinary' appears here in place of 'normal'. 'Normal' appeals to a meaning that is always opposed to an abnormal, which, in our context, is impossible to find. In contrast, 'ordinary' is to be differentiated from 'extraordinary', which is as desirable as ordinary. Psychopathology, therefore, is nothing other than ordinary life. An extraordinary life, if such a thing exists, goes beyond the scope of pathology. In a sense, we can consider the life of James Joyce extraordinary, which is when we speak of him as a genius. In the field of literature this is certain. But Lacan makes us think of Joyce as someone who was able to construct quite an ordinary life, even if the means he employed were colossal. His opus included the destruction of bourgeois literature first, marked by the centrality of the Name-of-the-Father, and after that, the destruction of literature itself - no more, no less.

Ordinary paranoia is the sum of beliefs we almost never think about: water flows from the tap, mother nature gives us her fruits and the State protects us from being destroyed by natural or human forces. Ordinary paranoia means the continuity between the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, as registers or dimensions in the Lacanian sense. The practice of

psychoanalysis means to distinguish precisely between these three registers.

As an illustration of these considerations, I have written a few lines on three cases within the CPCT of Barcelona. I have to say that I would have liked to have the art of Lytton Strachey and his 'Portraits in Miniature' ³(that are in fact longer) to show how somebody can take advantage of the brief encounter with an analyst.

I had the impression that Adele, a young woman who worked in scientific research, kept some traits of her infantile life to herself, and presented herself rather as acting, even pretending, to be someone who was not exactly there. She complained of anxiety and obsessive ideas about 'certain persons'. Of these persons I was only informed that it was currently a man, a colleague who lived in another town, whom she was fond of. That person didn't respond to her love in the way she expected. I had the impression that, both the anxiety and the unrequited love, were protecting her from something worse, namely the dissolution of the I, or the world itself. From time to time she had sensations of being strange to the world, what she also called apathy or gloom, even melancholia. The world was detached and strange to her. In fact, what she feared most was apathy, losing her feelings.

Ordinary thoughts about other people in Adele's mind were of two kinds: either general nausea, or, in particular cases the obsession for one 'person' who, since University, was substituted one after another. She was disappointed when she realised that this 'person' didn't think in exactly the same way she did. It was not love. It was, paraphrasing her words, the longing for an other whom she could tell who she was, precisely as a mystery. Once she had found that person she could let her being rest on him. And if the world was strange to her, it was because it lacked the one person to whom she could send this message and who would give her an adequate answer.

The name that Adele gave to her symptom was, in Spanish, *desencajada*, disjointed, disconnected.

³ Strachey, Lytton; *Portraits in Miniature and Other Essays*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1931

So, the possibilities of interpretation were very limited, because any word could bring an unbearable excess of sense that could knock down the construction by which she lived. From a different point of view it seemed as if she was waiting for some Other to reject her once and for all.

The other at this moment in time lived somewhere far away from Barcelona. Then, the day approached when he, travelling somewhere for a congress or conference, was to stay with her in this city for a weekend or so. The visit was expected to be an experiment that could bring certain results. The visit took place and nothing remarkable happened.

This experimental way of proceeding is essential to Adele. She does research in a field that could be situated between physics and biology, the molecular and the cellular, where living matter reacts simply as matter. She is good at investigating and is well established in the network of her speciality. In fact, her work acts as a sublimation and is decisive in her attachment to life, and as a stabiliser for the ups and downs of her mood. If it was not so she would probably be a melancholic.

During the sessions, and with the enlightenment of her situation, two new themes came to the fore. One was the art of music: she remembered her ability in musical expression and she tried to begin to express herself by writing music. The other was a kind of sliding from poetry to psychoanalysis. She liked to read poetry, especially the works of Fernando Pessoa, where she finds the same nausea of the neighbour that she herself constantly feels, except in the evenings when she goes out with friends to have a drink with them.

Adele has a particular way of approaching others. She takes them as objects of experimentation. She experiments to see how the other sees her. I said to her that it was no use to push these experiments too far in order to find the unknown (*despejar la incógnita*).

At the end of our sessions together, she asked me if Lacan was very different to Pessoa. I did not reply to that question, letting her find out for herself. I think that with Pessoa she referred more to a treatment of language than to an imaginary figure.

Delphi has problems with his talent and with performing in public. He is a talented musician, singer, composer, humorist and writer, but cannot earn his living from his talents. He does not know how to manage himself as an artist. He lives off unemployment benefit and his mother

very often helps him out. He is 50 and the grandson of a great intellectual, someone whose name belongs to the history of philosophy in our country and in Mexico. In 1938, his grand-parents and his mother, then a child, emigrated from Spain, fleeing from the civil war. They went to Mexico, where the father, a professor, worked at the University and wrote many books. A few years ago, some time after the death of the father (who remained obscure compared to the grandfather), mother and son returned to Spain.

When Delphi was a child of 14, he began to suffer from fits of chronic fatigue, from which he still suffers. He also suffers from raised blood pressure, and other little phenomena in the body. But in general, what was more relevant in his symptoms was, in his words, a disconnection between his feelings and words. That had always been the case for him. I think that comedy, wit and humour were a sublimation of that disconnection, what we could also call 'irony', not localised, linked to a situation, but a grand irony intrinsic to life, and to what generally makes sense.

In response to his complaint about the necessity for him to be sympathetic to his mother, who puts him up and helps him financially, but who tortures him with her bad temper, I said him: "Your mother counts a lot for you".

This mother attempted suicide some time ago, under the pretext of her age and her disability. She made Delphi an accomplice to her failed attempt.

He complained about the constant demands of his mother, making himself the scapegoat of everything that was not in accord with her whim. He then discovered, in a very oedipal way of understanding, the scenario he was repeating. His mother complains of something, he puts himself in the place of the father who scolds, then she stops being so spoiled with her craziness until finally she recovers her self control and behaves like a good girl.

But more relevant than this scenario that could be referred to as a kind of perverse infantile fantasy, something I took as a central point of the treatment, was the fact that Delphi discovered by talking to me that his mother's gaze was always present for him, like a permanent censor of his acts. It was, he said, "an institution he could not abolish". Here was, it seems to me, the limit to his irony.

He talked about the great difficulty he had in his work. In Spain, in Catalonia, his humour was misunderstood. Perhaps it was a kind of humour that was too intellectual, too literary for a country that likes broad humour. He composed songs full of wit, as he explained, giving irony to the facts and troubles of common life. On the Internet he finds recognition and success, but in Spain, he is even mistaken for a clown, which he is not. This confusion is very painful for him. At that point we entered into a conversation. I explained my point of view, taking from what I learned in Freud's book *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*.⁴ Humour depends very much on the context. A joke that somewhere, sometime is very successful, can be completely incomprehensible in another place and at another time. Therefore, he was of course very successful in the culture he grew up in, Latin-America, but in Spain he could not be understood that easily. After this conversation, Delphi talked about his skills again, in acting, writing and performing comical sketches, or comical songs, for adults and children as well. And then he confessed what was tormenting him constantly; a voice that says "Don't act like a clown!"

He was doing a series of performances in Latin America, where he would certainly play to full theatres. He then stopped our sessions. I said that when he comes back he could call the CPCT to continue his sessions, but he never did.

Olga is forty-five, she is single and works in a financial company, in the department that organises events and the diverse and complex travel arrangements of the executives. It is a hard job because she has to book travel, accommodation, tourist activities, meeting rooms, and other such things for individuals and groups, and often in a short period of time. The telephone and different languages are her tools, and the same goes for the other people in her office. She is one of the more experienced workers there and works long hours. Her responsibility is great, working for ten or more hours a day, even at weekends. Moreover, the staff change frequently, which makes things more difficult. She complains of stress, depression and powerlessness. From time to time she has outbursts of anger, followed by a feeling of great fatigue. More recently, on several

occasions, she has found relief in going out on the street walking the tree-lined streets in her area. A few weeks before that she obtained sick leave with a diagnosis of depression, which allowed her to come to the CPCT. Olga has some chronic diseases: a retinopathy and a skin disease for which she has taken medication since her adolescence. She smokes regularly and has a hoarse laugh that often accompanies her statements. Her laughter usually has nothing to do with what she is saying and she is surprised and a little disappointed that I don't laugh with her.

Olga lives with her mother in a house in an affluent area, on the outskirts of a little village near the city where she works. Her father died eight years ago, but I had the impression that her mourning has been very superficial, and that the essential part of the mourning work still remained to be done. She says that she likes family life and living in a community, but alone. She does not spend very much time at home because of her work. However, she loves reading and being immersed in the silence she enjoys in her affluent home. She has become an active member of an association that fights for the protection of the environment and against the property greed of the town council. The most important feature of her home is the silence. Silence is indeed what she is in search of. This is my only interpretation to her; what overwhelms her in her work is the noise, or more precisely, the tumult of the loud voices of her colleagues talking or shouting in different languages on the telephone. What she is looking for on her walks is a bit of silence, or more precisely, to keep away from the constant chatter of the voices.

It was not suitable to interpret any of this in oedipal terms, with the father, for example. That would certainly have woken up sleeping dogs.

At this point in time of the treatment the holidays came round and we agreed that after that period she could either come back and talk to me again, or to call up saying she would not come back any more. Olga came back and for two sessions explained that she had asked to be discharged from her medical attestation and that she was working again. Besides, she had set up a 'personal project', run on her own terms. As a matter of fact, this project was nothing other than a statement of her own situation. It consisted in enjoying the quietness of home, to read, to work less long hours, and to take care of herself. But, above all, she finds that she listens to others less. She then says that she didn't feel like coming back to the

⁴ Freud, S.; *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* [1905]; Standard Edition SE VIII, Hogarth Press

CPCT again. I agreed with her and said that if ever she felt like coming again, we were there.

Translated by the author