

Erwin Schrödinger in the Psychiatric Hospital

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The meeting between rationalities is the very core of the psychoanalytic treatment of madness. For we see madness as a field of research in the area of historical, political and natural disasters where the social bond disintegrates, language slips away, the unimaginable happens and tried and tested rationalities fail.

So faced with the irrationality of a behaviour or crazy episode we need to find 'the reason for this unreason':¹ these are the words of the one-time soldier Cervantes speaking through his *whimsical son*,² Don Quixote. Thus people we normally see as patients are seekers venturing into disaster areas in search of another Sancho Panza with whom to confront the craziness of what they discover.

An analysis of madness more often than not consists of discovering excised – not repressed – truths of history that are revealed during a heuristic journey taking place over often turbulent sessions. In fact it is the end-result of a continually surprising encounter with the rationalities carried by the analyst emerging from similar areas of disturbance: we have to get the necessary conditions to be able to articulate the unsayable and above all to hear, amid the interference of their encounter, or at least at the crossroads of different cultures.

Based on a brief clinical exchange with an African patient, in which the man who discovered the equations of quantum mechanics had a certain role, I shall take from Schrödinger's writings his warnings to those of us who are therapists. From the viewpoint of his field in the new physics, and contrary to the ambient conformism, he urges us not to give in to the principle of objectivization when we are 'struggling for meaning', to borrow the title of Paulin Hountondji's book.³

In the Tarner lectures given in Cambridge in 1956 Schrödinger wrote (p. 129): *'The relatively new science of psychology imperatively demands a living space. It makes it unavoidable to reconsider the initial gambit [undertaken by the ancient Greeks in order to construct an objective science at the cost of excluding the subject]. . . . I should now like to adduce as a supplement some quotations of eminent representatives of the older and humbler sciences of physics and physiology, just stating the fact that the world of science has become so horribly objective as to leave no room for the mind and its immediate sensations.'*⁴

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The genie of language: 'There's water in the gas'⁵

At the same time as carrying out research on the relationship between madness and the social bond at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Jean-Max Gaudillière and I went to the psychiatric hospital one day a week for more than 25 years. We worked there as analysts until about 3 years ago.

One morning I was leaving my little first-floor office with an old lady who was having a crazy fit. She had been committed 'because she was acting like a madwoman in her flat', as she herself expressed it. She was causing havoc in the building and the neighbours had ended up making a complaint. When I asked her what she did when she was 'acting like a madwoman', she confided to me a detail of the general panic that had caused a riot in the whole neighbourhood: 'she used to pour water on the gas'. Straightaway I laughed and replied: 'When there's water in the gas, all hell's let loose.'

For once the *genie of language* had prompted me with an expression that must go back at least 150 years, from a technical viewpoint. Normally I do not have a quick-fire mind, but rather a delayed-action one. In any event at that very moment, before my eyes, a kind of small miracle happened. This crazy little old dear, suspicious and hostile as she was, stood up straight. A smile lit up her face. I watched her grow younger: her childlike eyes looked out at me with a mischievous smile. In fact she was not so old, maybe as much as 10 years younger than me. How had she managed to appear so weighted down with age?

At once she started to talk to me about the war, when she was six in Algeria. Her father had died during those violent times and been buried unceremoniously. He had passed on simply, unostentatiously, 'without drums or trumpets', as we say in French. There too the phrase was to be understood literally. Besides, because it is a stock expression, we have quite forgotten that it refers to ceremonial drums and trumpets. And so between the two of us the word 'unceremoniously' had just been brought back to life as well, retrieving all of a sudden the shape and colour of events that had disappeared without trace with the deceased. Her father had literally not been given a grave in Algeria. Now that she in turn had reached, as she said, the threshold of old age, she felt angry about it, especially as her own son had left home.

It was as if her father were now demanding his share of ceremony. Through her this tormented soul had awoken in me, the analyst, the word 'ceremony' that is today so ordinary, so paradoxically shorn of the sacred. The *genie* of language and the *quickfire mind* dear to the Surrealists had turned up in the hospital, which after all was a place of asylum, to heat up the frozen water in the gas of that troubled time. A third dimension had surfaced unexpectedly that was neither her nor me but that linked us both together.

As far as I am concerned at least, I can easily explain what impelled me to make the old lady smile. For a long while I lived with a grandmother whose husband, my grandfather, had disappeared for years to be treated in hospital where he died; at home I often heard her talking aloud to him when she was on her own, which embarrassed me in front of my friends. I had to spend time entertaining her. So in a way I am used to it. That disappearance reminded my grandmother particularly of the First World War: my grandfather had already come close to death in the battle of

the Chemin des Dames. He was a stretcher-bearer *because*, as he said, he was in the band. For a long time I wondered what this odd causal link had to do with it. But recently I have learned, in a lecture by an Irish army psychiatrist called up for the Falklands War,⁶ that armies had traditionally relied on the therapeutic powers of music and musicians; these bandsmen were used as stretcher-bearers for the wounded during and after battle. It was only then I understood that it was not just a question of keeping up the troops' morale or whipping up their eagerness to fight.

In any case it was easy to see the effect of that chance disturbance: where the paths of our stories crossed, the old lady had found 'the reason for her unreason', the reason for her hospitalization. It was possible to see that reason come to life in a metaphor understood literally, the havoc caused in a family by the lack of a grave, by a disappearance robbed of its significance.

What language in its turn makes ordinary, in stock phrases, had found a way of reaching back to the source of metaphors to make real the very genuine danger of death, asphyxia and explosion that she must have faced as a child. That danger was quickly relegated to non-existence by her family when she arrived in France: first they had to rebuild a new life and above all not look back into the past. But that revived life episode, excised from her own experience, had revived, so to speak, a little physics lesson associated with dangerousness and summed up in a concise phrase that had become proverbial.

'We could almost say, man is a ceremonial animal'⁷

Personally I used to like working as an analyst in the psychiatric hospital, just as I still enjoy working with madness in my study, precisely because of those coincidences where a discovery slips into place: *arariskô*, 'adjust' in ancient Greek, is the root of the word art, as well as the name of the god of war: Ares. In fact, in the case of madness and trauma, psychiatric hospitals or the analyst's office often seem like no-man's-land, a bit like hell or more precisely purgatory, cut off from the world. People come there to try finally to filter out the violence of disasters, whether on a domestic or political scale; to care for the dead, the newborn not inscribed or ill-inscribed in the line, and the tormented souls of the living and the dead. Meeting a new arrival in the corridor I would often ask: 'Are you looking for someone?' And quite frequently it was someone who had passed away. Anyhow the question could also be put to the analyst, as I finally realized in the first hospital I worked in, when my grandfather appeared to me in a dream: as it happened the hospital was in northern France, not far from the Chemin des Dames. The day before, I had been talking to a man who had been in hospital for 20 years, whom I called 'the man with the pipe',⁸ and who vaguely resembled him, pipe and all.

In fact, if an element of talking and exchange is kept going, and not eradicated chemically or electrically, these places of asylum can house the invariant set out by Wittgenstein in the shape of 'man as a ceremonial animal'. It means trying to carry out the work of inscription of past or present traumas during the time spent in my office or in hospital; provided someone can be found to support it: literally a *therapist*, a word that, referring again to ancient Greek, means *the ritual double, the*

second in a fight. In Homer's epic in particular it refers to Patroclus in relation to Achilles:⁹ the one who takes care of the other in life and after death, performing reciprocal duties.

In his *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* Wittgenstein talks about the meeting between two rationalities in this way: one corresponds to the physical laws of nature and facilitates technical achievements regardless of cultures; the other corresponds to situations that go beyond the limits of language and expose us to dangers and disasters. It is this latter rationality that in his view is associated with a ceremonial dimension. It is not connected with explaining, he says, but with the impression a language of gesture shown to us makes, a language that finally tries to exorcize fear and calm us down.¹⁰

So in which rationality do we place that word *ceremonial*, with the idea of a *ritual double* that does not fail to impress us despite the context of our 'desacralized' societies? Wittgenstein observes that in their language, in the most everyday expressions ('I fear the wrath of the gods) and without even realizing it, our societies have not forgotten they were once animistic.

We have identified three points in this process that operate when *the tool of names is broken*, as Wittgenstein again explains.¹¹

We have to *show*: by acting out a metaphorical expression, taking it literally, when the words become things, we point to the problem that cannot be spoken, we call up in the other person emotions, sensations, impressions that are struggling to be articulated, like when a language is coming into being.

So we need to *name*: by articulating here what this old lady shows her, the analyst goes through the concrete aspect of her dangerous act which is repeated till she is committed, and lights on a proverbial expression that has meaning for both of them and for others in its application, which becomes metaphorical again. We should not be deceived into thinking there is a unique expression that the subconscious tries hard to conceal: it is quite the reverse, it is all there before us, broken fragments of words; we have only to pick them up and reply. Another analyst would of course have reached the old lady through a different door, playing with other limits of the language that had become newly common for them. Unlike the absurd gesture, such an encounter helps bring back into circulation a language that has been silenced for a long while, where ritual was lacking, where the impossible inscription of death was perpetuated, keeping death alive in a way.

And this is all drawing on one's *own resources*, as Wittgenstein stresses,¹² in this case the analyst's, personal resources of course, but just as much a shared resource that involves her and those related to her. Her involvement comes from her experience of similar hurts borne by 'everything she is connected to' – 'all my relatives', as the Lakota Sioux Indians say in their ceremonies – hurts that have impelled her to do this job and put herself in this position.

In the seminar entitled *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*,¹³ Lacan observed that the gods long ago deserted our western social practices, but that the outlines are still alive of the area where they used to be invoked: this is the area where nowadays, when traumas and craziness go beyond the boundaries of language, psychoanalysis is called upon to work.

The example I have quoted here illustrates this idea: around the duty of burial the

'turns of phrase' imply the sacred dimension, which slips into the most common expressions, whereas constantly using them obliterated that dimension long ago, sometimes disregarding the meaning. For these 'turns of phrase' express first of all the fact that we are not alone in certain circumstances. Recently my neighbour on the bus, a large gentleman from whom I was not expecting anything, said 'God bless you!' when I sneezed, as people used to do, in all languages and cultures in fact; I do not know why, but when I got off the bus I felt somehow reassured.

It is this kind of occasion the Greeks called *klèdon*,¹⁴ a happy chance, a little encounter, that confirms for you, from a third dimension, that you are on the right path. The story is told of a great Greek strategist, who was very keen on rationality in that cradle of western science, but who nevertheless triggered a battle when he passed some children playing hopscotch and one shouted: 'I've won!' Immediately he ordered his army to begin their own battle, and they won. Nostalgically invoking the ancient force of superstitions does not move our question forward.

'We have to search all through the field of language', says Wittgenstein in the text from the early 1930s¹⁵ in which he criticizes Frazer the ethnologist for using expressions like: 'These customs seem to be dictated by fear of the victims' ghosts.' But, asks the philosopher:

. . . why then does he use the word 'ghost'? So he evidently understands this superstition well enough, since he uses a familiar superstitious word to describe it – or rather he might have seen from this that there is something in us too that speaks in support of these observances by the savages – Frazer is much more savage than most savages, for these savages will not be so far from any understanding [of] matters as an Englishman of the 20th century. His explanations of the primitive observances are much cruder than the sense of the observances themselves.

Expressing in madness the silences of history

But what *speaks in us in favour* of animistic practices in the area of spiritual and psychic matters is definitely more accessible through texts from Antiquity than in positivist contemplation of our modernity. Indeed those ancient texts often supply us with useful aids for our patients.

In the case of the old lady it can confidently be said that the goddesses of vengeance, of *Nemesis* – the ones who are sent furiously mad by each war – were still pursuing that family. This is exactly what Socrates says in the *Phaedrus*. He might perhaps have added, in connection with this clinical example, that the woman *was rightly crazy, correctly crazy*: these are the philosopher's very words. Thus she was making manifest *ancient divine angers*¹⁶ that were seeking the space-time to be purified through ceremonies and sacrifices, following the indications given by Socrates. Like it or not, the analyst's office has in these cases become the place for those sacrifices and purifications.

To sacrifice or to sacrifice yourself! In fact the threat of suicide is often there, immediately present. The old lady's neighbours had made up their minds to intervene particularly when she started yelling for everyone to hear that she wanted to

end it all. At moments like these Gisela Pankow,¹⁷ an old analyst of psychosis in Paris whose origins were German, used to say to her patients: 'It is not yourself you want to kill, but you call up something else that you have to kill.' Probably without knowing it she was repeating an idea that was more than five thousand years old and from the Indian Vedas: when the time is one of confusion it is necessary to sacrifice so that *an articulated, defined time might intervene in an amorphous, anarchic period, to organize in the unexpressed, a regular time, a measure, a deliberate speech.*¹⁸ Yourself is of course the first thing available to you; but it is better to find something else instead, otherwise you cannot gain anything from the results of this necessary sacrifice.¹⁹

So in the name of what rationality were those texts written and handed down? In fact we must suppose that, when terrible things are involved, whether small or large – those that happen unexpectedly and remain incomprehensible, unforeseeable, improbable, literally *irrational*, like war, and her father's death for that old lady – all those disasters trigger first of all an initial period of *tabula rasa*, when all certainties are swept away. Their circulation and transmission between people has to be considered as an inescapable pledge. But the total solitude in which patients try to show what is haunting them but which is invisible to others should, contrary to appearances, be seen as an appeal.

This conflict of rationalities is reflected in the conflict that runs through opposing rationalities within psychoanalysis itself concerning what symptoms contribute to the field of analysis. Is it an expression of *the return of the repressed*, according to the hallowed phrase, of an unconscious inscription insisting on getting itself recognized, though the subject may be unaware? Or rather a *cut-off unconscious* which, as Freud himself said, *has nothing to do with repression.*²⁰ For in cases of trauma and madness subjects have been cast out of language, even unconscious language. They nevertheless insist on getting recognition as a *disturbing strangeness* in quasi-hallucinatory phenomena or via bizarre behaviour where what cannot be said tries to show itself.

Indeed a dividing line separates, on the one hand, analysts who think madness is not the domain of psychoanalysis – and in fact its traditional tools such as anamnesis here seem doomed to failure: it is true that evoking the past resolves nothing since in these cases everything is present. And on the other hand therapists who think this failure simply indicates the need for a change of paradigm in psychoanalysis itself, since the field of investigation they are involved in has changed: not a knowledge articulated in a way unbeknownst to the subject, but something impossible to articulate and represent. Here the aim of the analysis does not lie, I repeat, in removing repression; on the contrary it is a question of making repression, that is, forgetting, possible. Indeed madness and trauma are characterized by ever-present fears. Night and day it is impossible to forget the traumatic incident or the incessant mental working associated with it. All patients dealing with madness bear witness to this, and this is what makes them unable to concentrate on the tasks of normality, even psychoanalytic normality.

'I'm working with my hat,' said an inmate in the hospital mentioned earlier, as he opened the door for us in the morning (doffing the non-existent hat); 'please, give my head a rest.' In fact madness is associated with the collapse of the world of words, the word given, with the wearing away of the boundaries between inside and outside, future and past, of identity even, so that the central issue of the analysis is

constituting speaking subjects where they have become exiled for lack of someone else to talk to, a field of the permanent imminence of disasters that have not been able to be inscribed as part of the past. The end of the world is always just about to happen, as it is for Tintin at the start of *L'Etoile mystérieuse*.²¹

And so with the old lady there arose not so much memory as the eternal present of a period of troubles, which for her were not inscribed in the past, and which as a child she had faced alone, amid the absence of any kind of otherness: the adults were probably 'elsewhere', occupied with their own panic or terror. So she turned everything upside down in her house, which had previously been tidy, to make another order of discourse emerge at last. She had to show the havoc, *the water in the gas*, that was destined to find me so that I could record that impression, name it and do so *on the basis of my own story*. For how could I do otherwise? To tell the truth she and I were no longer two people face to face but were in three-dimensional space to give a shape to a period that had been silenced, especially as her family of colonials had been on the wrong side of history and because of that her little story had been relegated to non-existence.

'My craziness began at the crossroads of the big history story and my own little story,' one of my first patients told me when he emerged from an episode of delusion.²² It transpired that, persecuted by a conspiracy, he was searching for pointers in the confused period of 'cleansing'²³ that followed the Second World War, a process that had apparently touched his family, while his mother was dying with her lips sealed.

Thus we could say that an analysis of madness develops in the reverse direction to an orthodox psychoanalysis. The analyst's neutrality is seriously challenged because her persistent silence has the effect of massively increasing the terrifying silence that results from obliterating traces. In fact it is important to be a mirror, *a mirror to history*, as people said of the past in the past, in which are reflected for the first time facts that have been covered up and have neither name nor image. If the analyst remains unmoved out of professional duty, then patients are likely to keep going 'through the looking-glass',²⁴ where they continually encounter disturbing phantoms but cannot ask them *the reason* for their status as ghosts.

Descartes goes mad, or on the comprehension of rationalities

How then should we classify that other rationality with which psychoanalysis appears to be confronted increasingly often? On that point where it touches Wittgenstein's invariant of the ceremonial human being, it certainly inherits the mantle, in our times and in the West, of one of the oldest functions in the world: therapy for large and small disasters.

Paradoxically, but without trying at all to be provocative, that same rationality of 'follisophy' is as Cartesian as the one that allows us to reason mathematically in science. We should not forget that Descartes – before being caricatured by certain 'Cartesians' who themselves were never tempted by the slightest evil genie, and turned that adjective, their badge of belonging, into the symbol of a disaffected,

narrow rationality – found the inspiration for his philosophy during a night of madness, the night of 13 November 1619 to be precise, the eve of St Martin's Festival.

That night he dreamt that he was pursued by phantoms and winds from hell that hurled him downwards in a terrifying fall, and also by frightening thunderclaps together with a waking vision of extremely bright sparks in his bedroom like will-o'-the-wisps, which filled him with terror. Luckily a third dream came and gave him an interpretation as he slept, pointing out 'which path to follow in life': in short, to quit his position as a soldier and go back to studying sciences but without forgetting 'the poets whose writings, *even those that only spout silliness*, contain more *sayings that are more serious, reasoned and better expressed* than the ones to be found in the writings of men who never leave their offices'.²⁵ Descartes emerged from that hellish night vowing to go on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Loretto in Italy, which he subsequently did, but above all with the germ of his *Discours de la méthode*, which was published 18 years later in 1637, as a step-by-step guide through life, taking great care not to fall. For he 'judged that [he] could take as a general rule that the things we conceive very clearly and very distinctly are all true, but that there is some difficulty in correctly recognizing which are the things that we conceive distinctly'.²⁶ And to come back to our example, it would be just as absurd to want to repair the old lady's house with prayers alone as to reduce her father's burial to building a monument that was just masonry.

Thus the order of facts that unspeakable, unimaginable trauma creates where there are unburied dead is a real order of facts, universal enough to need drugs that are anti-pain, anti-stress or anti-psychosis. Those drugs switch off the neurones chemically but definitely do not calm our relations with souls in torment. This order of facts that are unrecognized, even dismissed, and often date back to wars present or past – no matter what their importance, whether social or domestic – is connected with *things to be done*, actions to be accomplished, in order to inscribe these dead in their own register: and this, as Antigone from the tragedy so rightly says, is the order of the unwritten laws.²⁷

So what is the rationality of the unwritten laws, which legitimate the actions of the young woman who was determined to risk her own life to bury the brother who died in a fratricidal war? To give those who *died badly* a place in speech, so that they exist in it, to inscribe them, this is the paradoxical rationality of the unwritten laws, which may contradict those of society: indeed they command us to *inscribe*, otherwise corpses stink, otherwise decay and corruption comes to reign over human beings in their social relations.

The place for unnameable things is to be found not only in tragedies but also in the recital of a people's epics. The Hellenist Gregory Nagy, who teaches at Harvard, defines these as stories told by veterans for veterans' descendants and held in a place where such deeds and such men have passed out of memory. They were recited in Athens, in the ceremonies of the Great Panathenea Festival, by the voice of the poet who in this performance is Homer.²⁸ The old lady's father was a colonial who had been killed, not in a very glorious role perhaps, but he could not be good only for dogmeat. Was she looking for someone to inscribe a little fragment of an epic appropriate for her situation as a child? And why should I believe her? When you are an analyst, you really need to clearly identify, from the facts you have, which

order of facts have been cut out of language and history) and are still seeking an inscription.

'Don't believe a word of what we tell you'

The question that arises then is naturally one of *belief*. To deal with that we have been assisted by people from animistic cultures, not in Africa but in the USA. It was the result of a chance meeting. In 1979 Jean-Max Gaudillière and I were presenting our work at a Massachusetts clinic, the Austen Riggs Center,²⁹ where madness is treated with psychoanalysis. There happened to be a cowboy psychotherapist there, Gerry Mohatt, who lived on the Rosebud reservation and was acquainted with the South Dakota Sioux, whose language he had learnt. After hearing our talk and recognizing in it some familiar features of the culture in which he had been immersed for 15 years, he invited us to visit; we had not the slightest ethnographic knowledge about them apart from traditional westerns.

First of all we took part in healing ceremonies without understanding much of either the language or the rituals. But above all, without having anticipated it, we found ourselves talking to medicine men on an equal footing and discussing our own cases, which reflected their therapeutic ceremonies. And so, from the moment when we managed to exchange those clinical histories with them, over seven summers we got to follow the ceremonies better as they unfolded.

We talked to the Lakota medicine man Joe Eagle Elk³⁰ as we would have done in the Massachusetts clinic, where we met old American psychoanalysts such as Otto Will or Martin Cooperman. By another kind of coincidence, which in this case was not total chance, a number of these psychoanalysts of madness, in fact those who were not afraid of crazy people, turned out to be Second World War veterans of the Pacific.

It took us a long time to understand the link between madness and war – world wars, Indian wars, the American Civil War, the Vietnam War – and appreciate how those therapists were open to hearing madness as a result of their own traumas. But after all it was also our history we were encountering there.

With the Native Americans our discussions around practice forced us to ask ourselves questions on two points:

First, about the word *belief*. Indeed at the end of the discussion, after they had used fragments of myths to explain a therapeutic episode to us, they regularly used to end with: 'Don't believe a word of what we say'. With the implication 'but *trust* us'. It was necessary to separate the logic that governed the rite from belief in Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit. For them we were not simple souls to be converted, and we were laconically told not to give in to suggestion.

This time the question of rationality turned on the distinction between 'believe', which everyone has the freedom to do, and 'trust', believing in someone, putting your trust in them. This distinction is prior to the discovery and interrogation of invariants between cultures and therapeutic practice. Rather as a potter from La Puisaye in Burgundy would quite quickly recognize the art of an Iroquois potter and his method of going about things, even though he used other forms, other symbols.

But is not moving from doubt, which affects the register of belief, to gradually building up trust the very strategy of Descartes' methodical doubt?

So what should we base that trust on, the very point that makes someone brusquely ask: 'Do you believe in my delirium or not? Do you believe that spirits are talking through my mouth and telling me to kill or kill myself?' If you answer 'yes', you look as if you are crazy too, even to the craziest patient, and furthermore you appear unreliable, because you are *acting as if*. But if you say 'no', there is no point in going on talking to you.

The possible solution to this aporia is worthy of the riddles asked in Zen or Mondô dialogues, which you have to answer fast, in a flash. It could be expressed as follows: 'I do not necessarily believe in your beliefs, but I trust you; there is logic in them and you are trying to find a way to show me something.' Of course this response is still too wordy and so the analyst, bogged down in her rationalizations, is likely to get, and often does get from the patient, a blistering put-down, just as the student does from the Zen master. Briefly, madness is a search at the limits of language that is carried out with a fellow seeker, as in those dialogues, which are veritable jousts around aporia and are still called by Lin Tsi³¹ 'dialogues of the host and visitor'. What allows the analyst occasionally to take on this role?

Second, on the issue of what authorizes the therapist to get involved in this logic, madness is usually pitiless. Those patients whose lucidity with regard to you, if only you attend to it, is quite embarrassing, tolerate no falseness, and very quickly detect what is inauthentic in the person they are talking to, what does not belong to the order of reason but rather to the order of persuasion and manipulation. For they are looking for a radical reason, a rationality that defies all belief. So how does the analyst give guarantees that her word can be relied on? Another phrase spoken by Stanley Red Bird, a man of great authority in the Rosebud Reservation, and often the spokesman for the medicine man Joe Eagle Elk, gives the answer here: 'I'd say you've come here to look for what you must have had at home, but has been lost for you.'

In fact, and without being won over to New Age syncretisms, Lacan's theory borrowed a lot from the Plains Indians via Georges Bataille's *La Part maudite*,³² and therefore also Marcel Mauss' *Essai sur le don*,³³ which inspired it. Talking about the festive and sacrificial expenditure, which the West Coast Indians call *potlatch* (and the Plains Indians call *give-away*, at least at the festivals we attended in South Dakota), Mauss' book suggested to Lacan that loss and sacrifice were at the root of desire. Especially when it is a question of getting true speech started again, articulated with the given word and the subject's recognition as well as that of all those to whom he is related, *all my relatives*, at moments of disaster when time has stood still, and people are treated as things.

It is true that we analysts go searching for and interrogating in our patients a field of investigation that is actually familiar to us. In other words no rationality can take effect here unless we look with the patient at our *own baggage* from which our judgement stems. In this interaction there occurs the opportunity to construct a rationality of madness, a rationality *with* madness, an encounter between heterogeneous rationalities.

To quote Socrates yet again, from *Theaetetus*,³⁴ it is about transforming 'primal ele-

ments, beyond reason, beyond discourse', which have not yet received a place in language between humans, by adjusting them 'in an intertwining' and weaving together of those elements with the analyst's: for, says Socrates, it is 'by weaving together primal elements that the *logos* is made that makes all *reason*'.

But, far removed from this work of weaving and text (from the Latin verb 'texo' to weave), it appears that nowadays we are seeing a so-called 'scientific' pressure on mental illness, a pressure which in fact is mechanistic and objectivizing, and this conception is dismissive of the interweaving that in our jargon we call psychotic transference. At the lowest level attempts are being made to measure its observable effects on the neurones, as if the stories of analysts and patients, which are connected first to oral tradition, living speech, were immediately suspect and unworthy of science in their own field. This is why I call for assistance here from one of the inventors of the new physics, Erwin Schrödinger (whose Tarner Lectures in Cambridge and London in the 1950s³⁵ I have just been reading), and he seems to lend grist to the mill I was then, as now, trying to turn.

That good old genius Schrödinger

So I am now going to describe the meeting of rationalities as I most unpredictably experienced it, thanks to a Socratic *interweaving* around the scholar's name, at the very hospital where the episode of the water in the gas took place and immediately after it, on the same day.

I was just coming out of my office after talking to the old lady when an African stood in our way. I can remember it as if it were yesterday. He was wearing sky-blue pyjamas like all who were kept on the upper floor. Probably to stop him running off or causing a rumpus downstairs, the ground-floor doors were open onto the courtyard and, beyond that, to the outside world. He had red eyes like someone who was not sleeping and he was staring wildly at us. I thought I knew him by sight; he must already have been hospitalized some time in the past.

He was stopping us from passing. I hardly had time to get concerned because he barked out that he was looking for a psychoanalyst. The old lady smiled – I should not call her that any more because she is now her true age. She cocked her thumb at me and went off asking me to take care of him.

In the corridor I indicated the way to my office and followed after him rather anxiously, wondering how to proceed. I know nothing about Africa or ethno-psychiatry. When we were sitting facing one another he warned me:

'Don't start talking to me about ethno-psychiatry. I'm not interested.'

'So what *are* you interested in?'

'Erwin Schrödinger.'

I was literally struck dumb. In French we say 'There's an angel going by'. My silence was disturbed rather than professional. I saw that he was aware of my confusion. The silence filled with question marks. I owed him an explanation.

First observation

When working with madness it is important to be honest with the patient about the bizarre effects that cannot fail to affect the analyst. Why? Madness is a rigorous research tool, not in the field of the quantifiable unknown but the area of the unknown between human beings. Madness normally clears its field of all useless and irrelevant details. And as we were saying, the analyst is its assistant.

With the utmost rigour it is essential to work on what falls within the field (*casus*), and which we generally want to get rid of in the name of everyday peace and quiet. However, if people take the trouble to be crazy, it is obviously in order to bring up facts that are not common in day-to-day life but have been excised from the relationship people share and are trying to get themselves acknowledged. So details appear on the margins of the field that the analyst inevitably attempts to minimize because they compromise her neutrality. But they are the most interesting ones in the work in progress. Here with the African patient the detail was the name of the inventor of the equations from quantum mechanics, and it dropped between us, creating the effect of a thunderbolt where I was expecting him to talk to me about local divinities. More than anything else, what struck me was an extraordinary coincidence. The part played by chance is decisive in such cases because it stops us being tempted to think up useless causes. Indeed how should I construct a cause-effect, past-present relationship when the past is not constituted?

However, as a first reaction and in the name of a neutrality that had nothing to do, particularly not here, with the rationality of our common search, I tried to dismiss the something that affected me. Indeed from his first words this patient at once positioned himself, not as an object of study or even therapy, but as someone who was already intervening in my story. I should have told him so because I owed it to the rigour of our work to inform him. But I was so surprised that I hesitated and took my time. In the meantime I asked about his life history while carefully avoiding talking about mine:

'How do you know Erwin Schrödinger?'

He told me that in Africa he had been in a class that was preparing for entrance exams to the higher maths *grandes écoles*, and that he was crazy about quantum mechanics. His uncle, a scientist, told him: 'If you want to be a real man, do physics'.

I was flabbergasted because, as I mentioned, I was just in the process of reading the books Schrödinger wrote for non-specialists, together with his biography by Walter Moore,³⁶ for a seminar I was leading with Jean-Max Gaudillière. That year – and this is why I can date the conversation to the 1990s – the seminar topic was dealing with the question of time stopping in madness.

However, I finally told him the part of our silent conversation that I had carefully refrained from admitting, the only element he had noticed being my surprise. He then asked me if I too had studied science. *Touché!* He had found a sensitive point. I had been forced to give up studying science in the class preparing for entry to the *grandes écoles* and take up studying literature, but I did not really know why: I even started analysis to try to look into the issue. But here I became more resistant still and I held back from telling him so:

'No, I didn't study science.'

A lie of omission or mental reservation. But he pressed me mercilessly: 'So what are you looking for in it?'

Second observation

This exchange is common in analyses of madness or trauma. The analyst becomes the object of questioning about the chinks in her armour: they do not go unnoticed for her facial expressions, body language, tone of voice betray what she is hiding, indeed often without her being aware. So this African patient was alert to what I was concealing, in fact less as regards content, which he could not guess at, than discrepancies he was trying to puzzle out.

Still I finally admitted, contrary to all psychoanalytic orthodoxy, that I had indeed started out on the same preparatory course as him and had switched off. Maybe my interest in Schrödinger stemmed from this conflict between two rationalities: the rationality of hard science, objectivity, and the rationality of the *subject*, which is what psychoanalysis deals with, as do literature and the oral tradition. At that moment I was really talking to him as I would to a fellow researcher about my *current* research at the EHESS:

'What interests me about Schrödinger,' I told him, 'is that he wants to "lower the supposedly impermeable wall" between those two areas'.³⁷ He says their animosity and contempt for one another led in fact to an impasse. And the physicist invents a little story about that: the subject is an anxious student in the time of Democritus who is supposed to have asked the Greek scholar questions not only about the discovery of atoms but about his own worries as to his place in the world and 'the path in life he ought to follow' (these are the very words of Descartes' third dream during the famous St Martin's night). The student would certainly have been accorded a kindly reception by the great scholar of Antiquity, a reception that Schrödinger says would be found less easily today.

'And so we are seeing a war where one rationality modelled on the hard sciences, which are armed with the principle of objectivization governing experimentation, confronts another rationality, which we must call *subjective* and which rests, as we see here, on anecdotes, personal stories, that are hard to quantify. They are unlikely to be taken seriously since they do not form a series.'

At once the patient stopped me. Personally he had solved the problem of experimentation: he adamantly refused to take his medication, he was definitely not going to be a guinea-pig subjected to those juicy molecules, to speak commercially. Indeed that was why he was confined to the first floor. But he had one quibble to raise with me: he did not see how on earth Schrödinger could be useful to psychoanalysts, unless we were interpreting the great physicist any old how. I answered:

'True, we shouldn't mix the discrete, quantifiable world of matter with the world of the mind. But Schrödinger himself gives us an excuse when, in order to loosen up our minds, he encourages us to think about the change in rationality forced upon us by the new physics. At the level of particles, he says, those two tyrants, the objectivization principle and the arrow of time, are done for.'³⁸

As he was listening patiently I carried on, pleased to have someone to talk to who knew the subject. Note that from that moment our roles were reversed. It was he, about whom I knew nothing, who was lending me his patient ear and letting me talk, having started out from a sensitive point, as we remember.

Third observation

These brief moments of reversal of roles between analyst and patient, host and visitor, Lin Tsi would say,³⁹ are the place and moment where *the primal elements intertwine* in the story of each of the two protagonists. From being *aloga*, without speech, they thus become part of *logos*, reason. This movement is not merely abstract and intellectual, because it takes place in action accompanied by the emotions and the bodily expressivity that go with it. Thus I remember that I became particularly lively as I tried to communicate my enthusiasm to him:

'As you know better than me, infinitely small particles are disturbed by the observation apparatus that illuminates them, and so give off photons. A bit like the hypersensitive subjects we talk to interact with the analyst and her own sensitive areas. So in fact we can only work with interactions. In addition the very fact of interacting precludes *per se* many elements that will forever remain unknown. Thus the ideal of exhaustiveness is impossible here. Finally the arrow of time can turn back.⁴⁰ And when I work in the hospital I know that's an everyday experience here, where you come across those odd symptoms of "future past".'

'I know', he replied simply. 'That's what happens when I'm out of it. A secret army gets into my place through the door or the TV; they command me to kill, or kill myself. As that puts the wind up me, I come into hospital.'

His phrase *secret army* was familiar: it was the name given to the Resistance in the mountains where I was born during the war. I told him so.

His suspicion died away. He had been severely ill-treated in his country, beaten to within an inch of his life because of similar events. He said his people were weeping through him. His uncle advised him to flee to France, but when that was not enough he came to the hospital for refuge. What he suffered more than 20 years ago was totally present. In fact when he told me his age I could hardly believe it: time had stopped, the arrow of time had been turned back, that was visible in his young face.

At that time I was less familiar than I am today with the field of wartime trauma. Since then our research has focused on that area, probably because of that African patient and other patients too who were very often descendants of people traumatized by war, using the techniques of madness to make events re-emerge that had been cut out of history.

Working with them demands both an *objective rationality* – there are established facts, even though no one wants to talk about them – and also a *subjective rationality* – confirmation of those facts can be validated only by a *subject* moving between both rationalities. More precisely we are dealing with the genesis of a *transitional subject*, as Gaetano Benedetti calls it,⁴¹ in the interaction between two disaster areas, *death zones* where a *negative existence* is being lived.⁴² This is the field where there occurs

the genesis of the rational epic subject of an excised story, based on the interweaving of elements that have come together there 'without rhyme or reason'.

It is indeed a subject that is born of the chance encounter resulting in a language game where the *therapeutic unconscious* performs its part in the space between two: between the person wounded to the soul, escaping from the objectivization that first torture has reduced him to and then where statistics, diagnoses, and the accompanying chemistry or electricity await – and on the other hand, so unexpected, his therapist, who may be able to mobilize the resources of speech, after first locating the famous sore points during her analysis.

In a way object and subject swap over here. Objectivity is given back to facts that have now been established and which had been hitherto struck off into non-existence. As for the human beings, who are easily *objectified*, either by disasters that leave them numb or else by science that turns them into samples, they find their place again and their function as subjects of the investigation into a story that is less untellable than inaudible.

Indeed he subsequently told me that his psychic wound was less to do with the degree of horrors he had seen or suffered than the treachery of certain members of his own side. But I was very far from working all that out for myself at that moment, and I did not know the precise definition of trauma given by psychoanalysts who had clinical experience of it.⁴³

The African patient was well aware of my limits then and got to his feet to end the session. He thanked me. The conversation had calmed him down completely, he was glad that because of me he had met up again with that good old genius Schrödinger. He was going to ask to leave the hospital. Indeed a week later he was no longer there. I have never seen him there since. He left me there at the top of the stairs leading down to the ground floor, and on the threshold of the problematic of trauma, where subjects have to create themselves out of 'struggles for meaning'.⁴⁴

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Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

Notes

1. Cervantes, *Don Quixote I*, chapter 1, p. 410. References are to the French translation, Paris, Gallimard, La Pléiade, 2001. 'The reason for the unreason that has come upon my reason so weakens my reason that with reason I complain of your beauty.'
2. *Ibid.*, 'Prologue', p. 391. 'So what could a sterile, uncultivated mind like mine produce other than the story of a dried-up, leathery, fantastical son, full of changing thoughts never before imagined by anyone else, just like the one who was produced in a prison where every discomfort has its home and every sad sound makes its dwelling?'
3. Paulin Hountondji, *Combats pour le sens*, Cotonou, Editions du Flamboyant, 1997.
4. Erwin Schrödinger, *Mind and Matter*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958, and *Nature and the Greeks*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954.
5. 'Il y a de l'eau dans le gaz' (There's water in the gas) is a colloquial expression meaning 'the atmosphere is tense', a fight or quarrel is about to break out. (Translator's note)

6. Morgan R. O'Connell (Surgeon Commander, Royal Navy, Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar), *The Falklands Experience*, oral testimony, 1982.
7. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, Retford, Brynmill Press, 1993.
8. Françoise Davoine, *Mère Folle*, Strasbourg, Arcanes, 1998, p. 114.
Both the clinical histories presented in this article were recounted in the book from a different viewpoint, chapter 4, pp. 43–66, 'La grande salle', with the titles: *L'enfant aux cheveux blancs*, p. 57, and *L'Afrique quantique*, p. 59.
9. Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, pp. 292–3.
10. Françoise Davoine, *La Folie Wittgenstein*, chapter 11, Paris, EPEL, 1992.
11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* § 41, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1958. 'Now suppose that the tool with the name "N" is broken. Not knowing this, A gives B the sign "N". Has this sign meaning now or not? What is B to do when he gives it? We have not settled anything about this. One might ask: what will he do? Well, perhaps he will stand at a loss or *shew* [author's italics] A the pieces. Here one might say: "N" has become meaningless, and this expression would mean that the sign "N" no longer had a use in our language-game (unless we gave it a new one).'
12. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Leçons et conversations, suivies de la Conférence sur l'éthique*, 17 December 1930, Paris, Idées Gallimard, 1971, p. 158. 'Lecture on Ethics', *Philosophical Review*, LXXIV(1), January 1965. 'At the end of my lecture on ethics I spoke in the first person. I think that is absolutely essential. At this level nothing can be viewed objectively any more, I can only enter the arena as an individual and say "I". . . . Am I up against the frontiers of language? Language is not a cage. . . . And here this must not be a sociological description, I must speak.'
13. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire. L'éthique de la psychanalyse, 1959–1960*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, p. 301. 'In other words this field (of the gods) is now accessible for us only from the outside, from the viewpoint of science, objectivization, but for us Christians, formed by Christianity, is not part of the text in which the question is in fact posed. This area of the gods we Christians have swept it away, and the question here, in the light of psychoanalysis, is precisely what we have put in its place. In this area what is there left as a boundary? A boundary that has probably always been there, but is perhaps the only thing that is left with its bones sticking up out of this field which is deserted for us Christians. That is the question I am venturing to ask here.'
14. Robert Flacelière, *Dieux et oracles grecs*, Paris, PUF, Que sais-je? no. 939, 1972, p. 18.
15. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough'*, p. 20 in the French version.
16. Plato, *Phaedrus* 244 d, e, French edition Paris, Belles Lettres, 1983. 'But that is not all: these very sicknesses, these tough challenges, coming from somewhere in certain families (*genos*), because of ancient divine angers (*mènis*), the prophetic raving (*mania*), when it occurs in those who need it, has found the way to get rid of them with ceremonies to the gods and cathartic rituals . . . allowing those who are rightly crazy (*tô orthôs manenti*) . . . to free themselves and their people from present ills.'
17. Gisela Pankow, *L'Homme et sa psychose*, Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1969.
18. Louis Renou, *L'Inde fondamentale*, Paris, Hermann, 1978, p. 59.
19. Charles Malamoud, *Cuire le monde*, Paris, La Découverte, 1989, p. 214. 'In fact the person sacrificing tries to stress simultaneously that they are the victim and other than the victim. By offering the victim, it is themselves they wish to offer and avoid offering . . . The poem can be the analogue of a victim: the poet cuts into the verbal material as the person sacrificing cuts into the animal's flesh.'
20. Sigmund Freud, *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva*, in S.E. 9, 1–95, 1907; and *The 'Uncanny'*, S.E. 17, 217–56, 1919. 'Everything that is repressed is unconscious, but we cannot say that everything unconscious is repressed.' French source: *Le Délire et les rêves dans la Gradiva de Jensen* (1907), Paris, Gallimard, 1983, p. 190.; and *L'Inquiétante Etrangeté, Das Unheimliche*, in *Essais de psychanalyse appliquée* (pp. 163–210), p. 205 (1919), Paris, Gallimard Idées, 1971.
21. Hergé, *L'Etoile mystérieuse*, Tournai/Paris, Casterman, 1947, p. 7.
22. F. Davoine, *La Folie Wittgenstein*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
23. The *épuration*, or 'cleansing', that followed the liberation of France was carried out both officially and unofficially; it was designed to punish collaborators but was also the occasion for settling private scores and exacting vengeance. (Translator's note)

24. Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking-glass*.
25. René Descartes, *Olympiques*, Paris, Garnier, 1963, p. 57. 'He attributed this miracle to the divine nature of enthusiasm and the force of imagination that makes the seeds of wisdom spring up (which are in the minds of humans like sparks of fire in stones) far more easily and brilliantly than Reason can in Philosophers.'
26. René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, Paris, Gallimard La Pléiade, 1953, pp. 136 and 148. See also a bilingual edition (London/USA 1994) by University of Notre Dame Press.
27. Sophocles, *Antigone*, v. 454, Paris, Belles Lettres, 1955.
28. Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond*, chapter 3, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
29. F. Davoine, *La Folie Wittgenstein*, *op. cit.*, chapters 9, 10, 11.
30. Gerald Mohatt and Joe Eagle Elk, *The Price of a Gift: The Lakota Healer's Story*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2000.
31. Lin Tsi, *Entretiens*, translated from the Chinese and with a commentary by Paul Demieville, Paris, Fayard, 1972.
32. Georges Bataille, *La Part maudite*, Paris, Minuit, 1967.
33. Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur le don' (1923–1924), in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris, PUF, 1968, pp. 144–279.
34. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 202 b, 'stoicheia aloga'. French edition, *Théétète*, Paris, Belles Lettres, 1976.
35. E. Schrödinger, *L'Esprit et la matière: Tarner Lectures* (Cambridge, 1958), *La Nature et les Grecs: Shearman Lectures* (London, University College, 1948), *op. cit.*
36. Walter Moore, *Schrödinger, Life and Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.
37. E. Schrödinger, *La Nature et les Grecs*, *op. cit.*, pp. 130, 132.
38. E. Schrödinger, *L'Esprit et la matière*, *op. cit.*, p. 187 & chapter 3 (pp. 183–95), Le principe d'objectivation; chapter 5 (pp. 211–25), Science et religion.
39. Lin Tsi, *Entretiens de Lin Tsi*, *op. cit.*, p. 112 § 19.
40. E. Schrödinger, *L'Esprit et la matière*, *op. cit.*, pp. 193, 194, 222.
41. Gaetano Benedetti, *La Psychothérapie des psychoses comme défi existentiel*, Ramonville Sainte Agne, Erès, 2002, p. 62 (*Psychotherapie als existentielle Herausforderung*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).
42. Gaetano Benedetti, *La Mort dans l'âme*, chapter 3, pp. 209–13: *L'être avec comme réponse du thérapeute à l'existence négative*, Erès, 1995 (*Alienazione e personazione nella psicoterapia della malattia mentale*, Turin, Einaudi, 1980).
43. Claude Barrois (former head of the department of psychiatry at Val de Grâce hospital in Paris), *Les Névroses traumatiques*, Paris, Dunod, 1988, p. 170. 'The second way patients are abandoned (secondary trauma) is by people and society who, after an initial concern, are reassured in good conscience by a few weeks or months of various interventions, and unilaterally decide everything is sorted out . . . Which mean that a large number of traumatic neuroses are made more serious by this second purely societal break. Psychoanalysis has the virtue of being the only discipline that really does anything about it.'
Jonathan Shay (preface by Gregory Nagy), *Achilles in Vietnam. Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, chapter 1, pp. 3–21. *Betrayal of 'themis', what's right*, New York, Touchstone Book, 1995.
Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière, *History beyond Trauma*, New York, Other Press, forthcoming.
44. Paulin J. Hountondji, *op. cit.*, 1997.