

**Report of the keynote address by Stijn Vanheule at the APPI Study Day on
The Psychoses – The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III 1955 - 1956
25th April 2015, Dublin City University.**

The APPI study day centred on an examination of *The Psychoses, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III, 1955-56*. Stijn Vanheule provided the keynote address, with presentations also by members of APPI and members of the Dublin Lacan Study Group on a diverse range of topics related to psychosis including literature, film, philosophy and the clinic.

Stijn gave a close reading of ‘*On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis*’ with a specific emphasis on sections 3, 4 and 5 of the text. This paper was published between 1957 -58, two years after Lacan’s seminar on *The Psychoses* and coincided with him finishing *The Formations of the Unconscious*, (1957-1958). As Stijn explained, in the paper Lacan moves from theorising psychosis in the plural (*Les Psychoses*) to isolating a singular structural mechanism characteristic of all types of psychosis (*La Psychose*). This mechanism is the ‘foreclosure’ of the Name of the Father which results in an unmooring of subjectivity within the signifying structural economy of the symbolic order. This theory of psychosis is applied to the case of Daniel Paul Schreber in part 4 of the text.

Contextualising the paper, Stijn advised that the text was written at the time when the philosophy of existentialism was flourishing in France and debates on the nature of existence were current. These questions of existence, most notably ‘**what am I?**’ Stijn highlighted, are at the crux of the subjective economy of both the neurotic and the psychotic, yet for the psychotic subject, due to the foreclosure of the paternal signifier, these questions cannot be formulated as they are in a neurotic subject and the relationship to the unconscious or the Other is rendered disordered.

In defining foreclosure, Stijn advised that Lacan did not equate it with Freud’s term *Verwerfung* (rejection) as to reject something is to first assume its existence in order to throw it away. Neither does it equate with Freud’s term ‘*Bejahung*’ which denotes an affirmation or assumption of an object. Rather, foreclosure is indicative of drive pulsations which have not become represented in the psyche, and as such no secondary elaboration is possible.

To demonstrate Lacan's theory of the emergence of subjectivity and to understand psychosis, Stijn elaborated in great detail Lacan's schemas L, R and I as they appear in the text. (*Écrits*, 2002, pp. 169-211). We learned how Lacan formalised the L schema in 1955 and had been influenced by Levi Strauss and theories of cybernetics. The four corners of the quaternary structure represent different aspects of subjectivity and the graph illustrates how the imaginary and symbolic axes connect and influence each other in constructing subjectivity. The R schema adds another dimension to understanding this construction and it is an attempt to explain the reality experienced by the subject using overlapping symbolic and imaginary triangles while incorporating the theory of the phallic signifier. Here, the Name of the Father is a signifier that substitutes for the enigmatic desire of the Mother which results in a metaphor that can lead to new signifieds. This is the Paternal Metaphor which enables questions of existence to be answered in terms of a phallogocentric desire.

Concentrating on subsection 4 of the text '*Schrebers Way*' Stijn elaborated Lacan's theory of what he called "Schreber's efficient and elegant solution to his psychoses". The I schema illustrates how Schreber attempts to stabilise his reality via the mechanism of delusion in a bid to compensate for the missing paternal metaphor.

Stijn emphasised the clinical implications of Lacan's theory of Psychosis. In working with a psychotic subject he recommended that the clinician adopt the position of an interested observer, as someone who tries to understand the psychotic's reality as opposed to becoming a threatening, invasive, jouissance filled presence, an 'expert' with authority. Vanheule made the point that Lacan, in interpreting the birds in Schreber's delusion as being the children Schreber never had, was perhaps guilty of the same thing he accused others of, imaginary interpretation. Stijn highlighted how Lacan's theory also implies that the psychotic, in a clinical sense, is only partially "mad" so all is not lost when it comes to having relationships with others. In the context of the imaginary or small others, relationships are still possible for the psychotic subject. It is the Other that is mad or disordered.

A lively discussion followed Stijn's talk and it provided a modern context for exploration of Lacan's theories contained in the paper '*On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis*'. Questions arose relating to the nature of the roles of mother and father in the family, perverse structure and its relation to psychosis, and the possibility of using other signifiers other than the phallus for signifying desire. Stijn commented that due to the decline of the Name of the Father in contemporary culture the phallus is not so central in determining desire.

Stijn Vanheule, Ph.D., is a Clinical Psychologist, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Consulting at Ghent University (Belgium), and a Psychoanalyst in private practice (member of the New Lacanian School for Psychoanalysis). He is the author of the monograph *'The Subject of Psychosis – a Lacanian Perspective'*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and of *'Diagnosis and the DSM, a Critical Review'*, (Palgrave Pivot March 2014). He has written numerous articles on Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic research on psychopathology, and clinical psychodiagnostics.

Report by Sarah Meehan O'Callaghan