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**From Daniel Paul Schreber through the *Dr. Phil* Family: Modernity, Neurology and the Cult of the Case Study Superstar**

### **Psychic Singularities**

Alongside modernity, with its emphasis on the rational (Descartes), the secular (Weber) and the bureaucratic (Bell), a notorious antihero explodes into popularity, a creature I term the case study celebrity—perhaps the strangest development within the history of neurology since Santiago Ramón y Cajal first stained the neuron using the Golgi process in order to perceive it as a totality in 1887. From “neuron” to “nervous” psyche, this neurological quantum finds its most Romantic form in the interpretations of coincident disciplines psychoanalysis and sexology, Victorian practices in which nervous disturbance deviates from scientific method in fostering a culture of the diseased and a poetics of the neural. These famous Others are truly Romantic in the sense of nineteenth-century British Romanticism, embodying a cerebral and corporeal alterity that runs counter to the reason-dominated subject of Enlightenment thinking. An exemplary individual whose fame derives from its moral and aesthetic distance from a shaky standard of bourgeois “salubrity” of the sort described by Sigmund Freud in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the eminent freak — eminent because he or she is both case study protagonist and antihero of rationalism — haunts modern logic and rationality with the specter of mental and bodily collapse. Via the work of psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung, Jones), sexology (Krafft-Ebing), and natural science (Darwin), modern thought redefines the human being as a contingent entity whose health or illness can only be accidental. Poised at the brink of an all-dissolving counter-modernity and functioning as

portal for superstition, ritual, magic, and the strange gravity of the irrational, the case study protagonist embodies this very fragility. The notorious and decisive break between Freud and Jung in 1912 testifies to this or an analogous instability, demonstrating psychoanalysis's own scientific crisis: is it science *per se*, or merely a literary venture? While Freud would like to posit his nascent discipline as rigorously scientific, others, like Michel de Certeau, have later read him as a literary critic or armchair anthropologist. Helen Vendler has even read him as something of a poet, coining the category "The Freudian Lyric" as an important contemporary form. Clearly, Freud lies somewhere between the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), a positioning to which the strange and marvelous case of Daniel Paul Schreber, himself sandwiched between competing diagnoses of neuroanatomy (Paul Flechsig, Guido Weber) and psychoanalysis (Freud), speaks.<sup>1</sup>

Shining bright against the dull, matte background of a compulsory socioeconomic normalcy, the neurological Other captivates the imagination with its utter relinquishment to repertoires of desire unthinkable for the standard citizen inhabiting and mastering nation-state and colonial empire. As elucidated by Michel Foucault theoretically in his *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, as well as materially in memoir trouvé *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, the modern world takes as its supreme project the rigid fixing of the body's limits and borders as the genesis of docility and domestication. For Herculine Barbin, the oscillation between the poles of female and male necessitates juridical intervention, as when in 1860 the French government orders that she live, dress and conduct the business of her life as a man ("Abel"), barring her from the female (and lesbian) identity around

which her world had been structured. The fixing of borders such as Herculine's gender, however, does not normalize anything, instead engendering a fantastic realm of chimaeric human monsters whose inclinations and proclivities perform the amusing work of *grotesquerie*; in other words, these demons and aberrations from a natural order cavort and frolic with ghoulish glee for a rapt audience frozen between fright and pleasure (for example, John Ruskin). As with Raphael's or Bosch's grotesques, monstrous epitomes of lust and appetite proliferate in playful visual displays for the eye of their Freudian beholders, who witness their shenanigans from the safe and neutralizing distance of the parlor, drawing room, lecture hall, museum, vitrine or library.<sup>2</sup> For these spectators, beholding the grotesque Other, such as Barbin-as-literary-artifact or textual relic, defines the safe aesthetic pleasure of witnessing the bizarre from afar.

Of this special set of monsters, the peculiar case of German Judge Daniel Paul Schreber looms large. Along with fellow Freudian travelers Dora (1905), the Rat Man (1909), and the Wolf Man (1918), he delineates an apparent boundary between health and illness at the same time that he destabilizes any difference between the two zones. As with his fellow celebrities, he is an allegorical figure representing one particular human vice: for Schreber, paranoia; for Dora, hysteria; for Little Hans, phobia. Similar to characters in a Medieval morality play who perfectly embody one aspect of the human experience, such as "lust" or "sloth," Schreber achieves synonymity with "paranoia," a term posing the danger of "exhausting" him in the philosophical sense (i.e., summing him up without remainder), as it does with regard to Freud's analysis of his passive homosexuality and paraphrenia. Outside psychoanalysis proper, other stars multiply, many famous for "being the first" to personify a unique malady, as with Ludwig

Binswanger's 1944-5 case study of Ellen West, subsequently the "world's first" anorexic.<sup>3</sup> Hence while a Medieval or Renaissance saint, like St. Catherine of Siena, might starve herself into oblivion, she still cannot own anorexia, nor can it own her, since she, unlike West, is not consumed by the renunciation of hunger. Binswanger comprehends the cultural value of a case study heroine like Ellen West: "On the basis of the life-history, her specific name loses its function of a mere verbal label for a human individuality—as that of this unique time-space-determined individual—and takes on the meaning of an eponym (*fama*)" (Binswanger, 267). Taken for a melancholic by Kraepelin (257), diagnosed by Bleuler as a schizophrenic (266), and finally discharged from Wolfgang Binswanger's Kreuzlingen Sanatorium only to leave and commit suicide, West leaped into history by starving herself into oblivion long before Karen Carpenter dieted herself out of existence or Oprah Winfrey publicly collapsed from diet exhaustion. Like these and other famous deviants, Schreber uses his very existence to throw into chaos the notion of a "normal" human being, thus being exhausted by his condition at the same time that by and through it his humanity crystallizes: if even a prominent judicial expert with enviable property, family and career can find himself slipping away into a miasma of hallucinations, what hope is there for those of us hanging by a thread already?

Even going so far as to erect a phantasmic, competing neurology of his own design, Schreber echoes his era's *Zeitgeist* through his bizarre participation in the science of stimulation, enervation, vibration and impulse transmission: he, too, is a neurologist, taking his own body as experimental object and using it to generate and test hypotheses. For example, Schreber theorizes about the relation that obtains among nerves, gender and sexual arousal. In Schreber's system, nerves of Voluptuousness, or *Wollustnerven*, are

primarily the property of women, who seem to have these spread across their bodies evenly in the manner of, to pervert an image from contemporary physics, cosmic radiation dispersed throughout a galaxy. Subject to the pernicious influence of rays in general, Schreber reverberates with the re-imaging and re-imagining of materiality that the physics of his and previous eras had brought to fruition: a world in which matter and energy are revealed to be interdependent and, to some extent, interchangeable: not to the  $E = mc^2$  extreme, yet of a part with Sir Isaac Newton's experiments with rays of lights and prisms in the *Opticks* of 1704, or Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen's discovery of electromagnetic radiation in 1895.<sup>4</sup> Schreber's eventual unmanning (*Entmannung*) causes him to develop these nerves in particular. While the male body does contain signs that perhaps it, too, once contained pleasure nerves (e.g., the vestigiality of male nipples), it has long since been rid of them (Schreber, 61). Finally as a result the dispersal of *Wollustnerven*, women are predominantly bisexual: "Further, the souls knew that male voluptuousness is stimulated by the sight of female nudes, but on the contrary female voluptuousness to a very much lesser extent if at all by the sight of male nudes, while female nudes stimulate *both sexes equally*" (155). Theories such as these reveal Schreber as both patient and doctor alike, offering a heretical diagnosis and etiology of his malady.

In his *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903), Schreber recounts in florid, vivid prose his transformation from juridical expert to belching, prattling, transgendered trollop, therein documenting the very anxieties confronted by the modern creature of reason as first systematized by Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Schreber's illness is thus utterly vital as blueprint "or secret history" of modernity, occurring not as psychotic hiatus with a progressive present, but rather as supremely "of

the moment” and symptomatic of a historical now.<sup>5</sup> As Eric Santner demonstrates in his *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber’s Secret History of Modernity*, this historical now was a pre-Hitler Germany on the verge of immersion in the totalitarian milieu—a *Deutschland* replicated in miniature in the disciplinary theories of Schreber’s father, Moritz, to whom Schreber himself refers: “Souls knew very well that a man lies on his side in bed, a woman on her back (as the ‘succumbing part,’ considered from the point of view of sexual intercourse). I myself, who in earlier life never gave it a thought have only learned this from the souls. From what I read in for instance my father’s MEDICAL INDOOR GYMNSTICS (23<sup>rd</sup> Edition, p. 102), physicians themselves do not seem to be informed about it” (155). That Schreber’s historical now involved the familial “now” of his being the son of a famous theoretician of childhood disciplinary practices and devices, Moritz Schreber, sets up a microcosm/macrocosm dynamic, with a fledgling pan-Germanism of clear-cut bloodlines and adherence to tradition informing and reciprocally being informed by stern paternalism and blind devotion. Later analyzed by Freud as historical residuum in his foundational *Psychological Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)* (1911), Schreber’s account of his supposed victimization by a mortifying divine force blowing in from pre-modernity forms the basis for a theory of the rational human being’s assault by perceived endangering forces atavistically forcing him or her to exit the loop of modernity and contemporaneousness for a vengeful, mystical, untamed past. He is also important to the modern taxonomy of mental illness; for Freud, it is essential to determine whether “paranoia” is a separate entity from schizophrenia, or if the two are fused, as Kraepelin had suggested, and Schreber is just the man to illustrate his case

because of the discreteness of paranoia as diagnostic category (151-4). Through Schreber, *wahnbildungsarbeit*, or “the work of delusion-formation,” enters the lexicon.

Keeping good company with the necrophiles, gender dysphorics and sadomasochists populating Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), Judge Schreber exposes a vibrant counter-narrative within modernity, one which persists, despite any and all attempts at institutionalization, abjection or eradication. If the normative narrative of modernity involves a reason centered in Descartes’ cogito, then the counternarrative authored by Schreber and others is the story of the irrational and unreasonable, as well as of the dispersed self (a self not neatly contained within the boundaries posed by a cogitating substance, or *res cogitans*). Himself a product of neurology, Schreber emerges from within its folds as a modern synaptic oddity and paragon of masculinity: neurology, psychoanalysis and poetry all mandate his existence, ensuring his survival for a future committed to the allure and glamour of dysfunction. In his eyes the future of both the German state and humanity in general, Schreber is manhood in the extreme—an odd state of affairs, given his transformation into God’s consort. Hence although in his daily life he had been unable to reproduce and had instead chosen to adopt, in his fantasy life he possesses the position and means to repopulate an entire planet with his progeny—but only after he has developed *Wollustnerven*. Oddly enough, Schreber becomes most masculine when he becomes most feminine, using his transformed body to bear the divine race which will inherit an earth stripped bare of human life after their gastrulating zygotes have taken root in his uterus.

Jung’s identification of a Collective Unconscious in his essay “The Structure of the Psyche” makes it possible that even the most Cartesian cogito may awaken to

discover a nonpersonal Archetype from a long-gone enchanted era reasserting its presence via the logic of anachronism, as he discussed anecdotally in his “Instinct and the Unconscious.”<sup>6</sup> In Jung’s example, a man who, convinced that the sun is blowing wind through a tube and striking his eye with resulting the jet of air, blinks repeatedly, neither hallucinates nor dissociates: he has merely succumbed to a resurgent Mithratic memory of the sun’s penis which has sedimented within a group psyche and returned to the present, where, unrecognized, it creates the illusion of psychosis (36). Similarly, for existential psychology (primarily R.D. Laing and Thomas Szasz), there is no schizophrenia, only the social construct of the deviant or, as phrased by Deleuze and Guattari, *le schizo*; though not due to any past historical apparition reasserting itself, here the schizo’s madness stems from the social need to categorize certain behavior as pathological, and in essence disappears, since pathology becomes mere social construct and hence loses its pathological quality. For theories such as these, there is no possibility of celebrity, no opportunity for the everyday human being to leap out of banality in the creation of psychological notoriety, since there is technically no insanity, only a societal need to institutionalize those whose world-views are different and dangerous. To visit another competing theory of derangement, John Paul Sartre’s Existential Psychiatry put forth in his *Being and Nothingness* founds itself upon the radical split between two realms or orders of being, the inhuman in-itself (*l’être en soi*) and the human for-itself (*l’être pour soi*). For Sartre, Existential Psychiatry is possible when Freudian determinism (drive, ego) is eradicated so that the for-itself might correctly regard itself as “unthinglike” and stop living as if it were either an in-itself (thing) or for-itself-in-itself (the for-itself taking itself for a thing, such as happens with personality, type or ego). In



Sartre's system, there is also no chance of psychic celebrity, since mental illness is not something which might be owned or even embodied: rather, it becomes a mis-ontologization remedied only through the ego's dissolution. The existence of the career psychotic or neurotic reveals a strange liaison between the Freudian psychic map and the celebrity of the outlaw. Reduced to an *en soi*, and coinciding absolutely with his illness, a case study protagonist like Schreber owns his nervous impulses so completely that they become a species of property, radical even by the seventeenth-century's standards.

Along with figures like Ellen West, who owns anorexia, Dora, who owns hysteria, or the *Dr. Phil* Family, which owns the neurosis *du jour* (everything from teen pregnancy to cult brainwashing, depending on the season), Schreber carries his illness with him everywhere he goes, tracing out an arc of fame which more staid members of the bourgeoisie can consume as cathartic corrective for their own sobriety.<sup>7</sup> With Schreber, medical representation and self-representation emerge jointly and coevally, but only on a map with blurred boundaries and a very fuzzy key: still, his exterior representation as psychotic and delusional by the psychiatric and psychoanalytic community and his interior representation as awash in the pleasures of divine prurience converge, making Schreber's version of Schreber a poeticized take on clinical language in general. Against all odds, this Schreber sets himself up as author not only of his own psychological destiny, but also of a memoir, carrying on a legal battle regarding their publication at the same time that he conducts intergalactic conversations and finds his body swapping genders. Dr. Guido Weber's analysis of the *Memoirs* and their fitness for publication reads like a recipe for literary illustriousness:

When one looks at the content of his writings, and takes into consideration the abundance of indiscretions relating to himself and others contained in them, the unembarrassed detailing of the most doubtful and aesthetically impossible situations and events, the use of the most offensive vulgar words, etc., one finds it quite incomprehensible that a man tactful and otherwise of fine feeling could propose an action which would compromise him so severely in the eyes of the public, were not his whole attitude to life pathological, and he unable to see things in their proper perspective, and if the tremendous overvaluation of his own person caused by lack of insight into his illness had not clouded his appreciation and the limits imposed on man by society (Addendum B, "Asylum and District Medical Officer's Report," 347-348).

The back cover of the 2000 edition of Schreber's *Memoirs*, designed specifically to entice readers rather than to repel them or prevent them from existing in the first place, as had Guido Weber's dismissal, puts it more succinctly, revealing their commodity power one century later: "His book is perhaps the most revealing dispatch ever received from the far side of madness." Of course the notion of ownership I am using with regard to Schreber and paranoia is problematized by the fact that, in the end, it is not Schreber who, via the *Memoirs*, owns paranoia, but paranoia which owns Schreber—and Freud who, via interpretation, owns this ownership. There are certainly other paranoid schizophrenics, but there is only one Daniel Paul Schreber, originator of the discourse surrounding paranoia, interpreted into notoriety by Freud, and leaving behind a ghastly account of bodily workings and cosmic transgressions.

In league with the case study's most extreme limit personality, the serial killer, the case study maverick garners domestic and global attention alike only within a culture in which the commodity can flourish without interruption or impediment: capitalism. As discussed by Richard Tithecott, the serial killer represents the secret perverseness of capitalism, displaying a mania for accumulation according to which parataxes of

shopping and hoarding are displaced into the realm of bodies (instead of amassing a handbag collection, or, if he is Ed Gein, constructing one from pelvic fragments, the serial killer collects corpses, the more, the better). This dirty interior Schreber, too, shares, demonstrating that, according to the logic of capital, even a disequilibrium within neurotransmitter levels is something which might be privately owned and culturally mobilized as a selling point: hence the legal wranglings surrounding Schreber's publication of his *Memoirs*, which could only see the light of day after he had been released from tutelage by the Royal Superior Country Court of Dresden in 1902. With regard to this volume, Schreber's ownership of them is a matter for other judges to decide. Their conclusion relegates Schreber's words to Schreber, returning his memoir and the rights regarding their publication to him: "Therefore in considering the Appeal which has been lodged this must lead to the tutelage inflicted on plaintiff being rescinded without entering into new evidence by witnesses offered by him" (Schreber, 440).

Marketed by Freud as advertisement for psychoanalysis, Schreber and other paradigms of psychic disturbance populating Freud's pristine terrain not so much prove a theory (here, that of the *wahnbildungsarbeit*) as much as launch a new discourse (Freudian psychoanalysis) and cultural icon (Freud). It is thus no accident that, of all competing psychoanalyses, it is Freud's and not Jung's (too mystic), Adler's (too alpha-male), or Lacan's (too philosophical) which captures the public imagination, since it is specifically Freud's which best provides for private ownership of maladies, thereby making possible a cosmography of world-famous lunatics and sexual deviants with whom it becomes imperative for literate and refined human beings to familiarize themselves. This heterological tradition imports the *demimonde* into the Academy, where it stands as

corrective for philosophy's adherence to a dry Kantian epistemology and aesthetics, Critical Theory's untiring focus on commodity evils, or psychology's naïve belief in perfectibility.

### **God's Plaything**

If *Senätspräsident* Daniel Paul Schreber is anything, he is a visionary neurologist, one for whom vibrating nerve fibers exist as religious and cosmic conduit. Himself an intense neurological study, he is far too educated a human being to abide by the prescriptions of, for example, a Kraepelin, whose theory of hallucinations Schreber finds grossly materialistic—so much so that he openly disagrees with him, launching a more comprehensive theory: “If psychiatry is not flatly to deny everything supernatural and thus rumble with both feet into the camp of naked materialism, it will have to recognize the possibility that occasionally the phenomena under discussion may be connected with real happenings, which simply cannot be brushed aside with the catch-word ‘hallucinations’” (84). Fundamentally empiricist, Schreber lays out his *Memoirs* methodically, and with attention to thematic organization (God's miracles follow an organic clustering, united temporally along a timeline and physically in various bodily regions). From the start, Schreber is interested in providing a philosophical structure to his story—this despite the fact that some find his ruminations to constitute only an “unconscious parody of the preoccupations of philosophy” (Dinnage, xix). In Schreber's structure, a minimum register of foundational axioms provides support for a more hefty network of secondary elaborations; in fact, within this arrangement, signs of Schreber's

mental illness do not pop up until twenty-two pages of text, at which point Schreber casually, even credibly, interjects: “I will at present only mention the fact that the sun has for years spoken with me in human words and thereby reveals herself as a living being or as the organ of a still higher being behind her” (22). As laid out in the introductory chapters to his *Memoirs*, several immutable facts and conditions make possible all the mayhem that follows. One example of such an axiom is the postulate that, without exception, God does not possess the capability of understanding the live human being: “A *fundamental misunderstanding* obtained however, which has since run like a red thread through my life. It is based upon the fact *that, within the Order of the World, God did not really understand the living human being* and had no need to understand him, because, according to the Order of the World, He dealt only with corpses” (62). For God, the human being can only be known as expired block of flesh—hence his continual misapprehensions of Schreber, and the tortures inflicted upon him via divine miracle. Atomic, a statement as this crucial one achieves fulfillment later on in the text, when Schreber’s bowels come under scrutiny. Convinced that God does not find him sufficiently intelligent to empty his own cloaca, Schreber uses defecation to prove to God that, indeed, his mind is in working order: “The question ‘Why do you not then sh....’ is followed by the capital answer ‘Because I am somehow stupid.’ The pen almost resists writing down the fantastic nonsense that God in his blindness and lack of knowledge of human nature in fact goes so far that He assumes a human being could exist who—something every animal is capable of doing—cannot sh.. for sheer stupidity” (206). As vile as the image of an “eliminating” Schreber experiencing the “soul-voluptuousness” of defecation may be, its importance lies in the fact that an intricate neurological and

phenomenological theory is being proven by way of bodily behavior that can only be compulsive (206).

Since God cannot comprehend either human thought or the human organ of thought, brain activity functions as a perpetual source of ignorance and divine cruelty. Thus for Schreber the absolute limit to his own intellectual stream in the “thinking-nothing-thought,” or *Nichtsdenkungsgedanke*, emerges as a particular source of anxiety. Recalling the idea of intentionality championed by Brentano and later challenged by Sartre—i.e. the notion that consciousness must always be conscious of something—this delicate and intuitive concept does more than merely posit oases of non-thought or *négatités*, cerebral hiatuses where thinking nothing is possible.<sup>8</sup> For within the detailed system built by Schreber—the first of its sort to be carefully written down with an eye to its systematicity and hence the original masterpiece of *wahnbildungsarbeit*—any lapse in active thinking proves the divine hypothesis that Schreber is himself some sort of idiot whose speech can only echo that of birds senselessly twittering away with meaningless fragments of human speech. When human language, as embodied by Schreber, meets the holy language of *Gründsprache*, or “Basic Language,” cataclysm and pain can be the only outcomes. Essentially a language of reversal (euphemism) and aporia (the sentence fragment), the speech inflicted upon him by mystical entities like Flechsig, von W, or any of the “little men” who populate his ontologically bustling world drive him mad by causing him constant semantic and grammatical labor.<sup>9</sup> Having to de-euphemize euphemisms in order to determine the true malignancy of their content, while simultaneously substituting the missing words from half-uttered sentences, Schreber finds no respite from the work of translation: compared to him, a contemporary Schreberian

*memoiriste* like Anne Heche (“Celestia,” as she renames herself in *Call Me Crazy*, the narrative of her own descent into madness) will have it easy.<sup>10</sup> Overloading his nerves, constantly having to decode everything uttered in *Gründsprache* causes Schreber’s own nerves to resonate, thereby launching an unchecked internal dialogue of *Nervensprache*, or “Nerve Language”:

Normally under normal (in consonance with the Order of the World) conditions, use of this *nerve-language* depends only on the will of the person whose nerves are concerned; no human being as such can force another to use this nerve-language. In my case, however, since my nervous illness took the above-mentioned critical turn, my nerves have been set in motion *from without* incessantly and without any respite (55).

Identified by Schreber as another axiom, the idea that nerves possess their own channel and means of communication provides clues as to Schreber’s own illness. Because *Gründsprache* is essentially an inverted and inchoate language, it necessitates the constant motion of *Nervensprache*. Consequently, there is no “thinking-nothing-thought,” with the rare exception of musical activity (the piano, the ocarina), or with the violent intrusion of “interferences” afflicting his intermittent equanimity—for example, the Bellowing Miracle, Schreber’s *stoppage* of choice:

The advent of the bellowing-miracle occurs uncontrollably when my muscles serving the processes of respiration are set in motion by the lower God (Ariman) in such a way that I am forced to emit bellowing noises, unless I try very hard to suppress them; sometimes this bellowing recurs so frequently and so quickly that it becomes almost unbearable and at night makes it impossible to remain in bed (188).

Interferences such as these chronic attacks of bellowing prevent Schreber from having a moment's rest, placing him on pins and needles perpetually and forcing his musculature into a non-stop tonic state which can only cause fatigue and exasperation.

The system in which Schreber finds himself imbricated, and which takes him as “Eternal Jew” and star, is cacophonous and verbally disruptive.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the voices of the “Forecourts of Heaven” or “Tested Souls,” spoken in a cold and exasperating *Gründsprache*, there is also another parasitic language of roteness and mindless repetition: the ornithological language with which various birds prattle on.<sup>12</sup> In this language, nonsensical substitutions cause perennial confusion—for example, “Santiago” and “Cathargo” are absolutely equivalent, as are “Chinesenthum” and “Jesum Christum” and “Ariman” and “Ackermann,” among other words and expressions (192-3). Though not all birds speak this dead language—pigeons and chickens do not seem to trouble him—those that do torture him with the constant specter of his own lapse into automatic speech:

To the miraculously created birds belong all fairly *fast flying* birds, particularly all singing birds, swallows, sparrows, crows, etc., *of these species of birds I have never once during these years seen a single specimen which did not speak...* On the other hand the pigeons in the court of the Asylum do *not* speak, neither as far as I have observed a canary kept in the servants' quarters, nor the chicken, geese and ducks which I have seen both from my window on the plots of land lying below the Asylum, and on the two mentioned excursions in villages through which I passed; I must therefore presume that these were simply natural birds (196).

Mistaking Schreber for one of these birds, God must indefatigably test him in order to ensure that the one human being who will repopulate the earth with his progeny is not



some kind of avian robot or twittering machine out of a Paul Klee canvas.<sup>13</sup> The “delusions of grandeur” which will become a paranoid schizophrenic staple find their earliest expression in Schreber’s own notion that, somehow, the world has ended during his institutionalization. Apocalyptic, Schreber finds himself placed in the unique position of having been chosen to repopulate a razed earth with “the Schreber race.” Finally beyond the threats of Catholicism, pan-Slavism and Judaism, which haunt him throughout the text, Schreber now ponders the awesome responsibility of inheriting an entire planet—a true task, given that he will also have to contend with inimical religious forces as well, although these will be rephrased in the language of radiation:

Thus while still in Flechsig’s Asylum I became acquainted with rays—that is to say complexes of blessed human souls merged into higher entities—belonging to the old Judaism (“Jehovah rays”), the old Persians (“Zoroaster rays”) and the old Germans (“Thor and Odin rays”) among which certainly not a single soul remained with any awareness of the name under which it had belonged to one or other of these peoples thousands of years ago (30).

During his transfer from Flechsig’s institute to “The Devil’s Kitchen,” the streets of Leipzig appear in lurid theatricality. All these buildings are merely stage props installed to provide the illusion that the human species continues to dominate a spinning globe from which it has in actuality been expelled:

I was inclined to take everything I saw for a miracle. Accordingly I did not know whether to take the streets of Leipzig through which I traveled as only theater props, perhaps in the fashion in which Prince Potemkin is said to have put them up for Empress Catherine II of Russia during

her travels through the desolate country, so as to give her the impression of a flourishing countryside (100).

For Schreber, urban sprawl has been reconstituted as *mise-en-scène*, his life a dramaturgical production starring himself as diva and heroine.

Yet even if this vision proves incorrect, and Schreber has not been selected as the last receptacle of the *Homo sapiens* genetic treasure, then other means of creation remain not only viable, but inevitable. Hence Schreber entertains fantasies of metempsychosis, transmigrating into a specific chain of bodies: a Hyperborean woman, a Jesuit, a Burgomaster, “an Alsatian girl who had to defend her honor against a victorious French officer,” a prince from the Mongol Horde (88). These cross-cultural and transgendered entities represent critical transmutations marking Schreber as undifferentiated flesh or, if a more contemporary metaphor may be endured, “stem cell,” a man in possession of organs which deteriorate, become other organs, or switch functionalities, and whose identity transcends the constraints of space and time. Perverting Haeckel’s Biogenetic Law, Schreber demonstrates an incredible degree of pluripotency, his cells seeming to have retained an ability to re-draw the course of his own development. Even if none of these transformations come to pass, there is always the possibility of intergalactic travel, as when two brothers of Cassiopeia initiate a conversation with Schreber, or when he finds himself living for a time on Martian moon Phobos.

Central to Schreber’s importance to future generations, though, is his emasculation, or *Entmannung*. This seed which will germinate into the full-fledged belief that his body has biologically changed from male to female comes early in the narrative, just before Schreber’s illness consumed him. Just prior to institutionalization,

Schreber is seized by the intrusive thought of what it would be like to be a woman on the other side of copulation: “Furthermore, one morning while still in bed (whether still half asleep or already awake I cannot remember), I had a feeling which, thinking about it later when fully awake, struck me as highly peculiar. It was the idea that it really must be rather pleasant to be a woman succumbing to intercourse” (46). Up until this point, Schreber had never imagined what it would be like to be “woman,” but from all outward appearances the surfacing of this thought sets in motion Schreber’s concomitant decline as judge and rise as cerebral architect. Soon after, the very God who cannot comprehend any live human entity, let alone one on the verge of discovering his secrets, takes Schreber as his consort, catapulting him into a moral crisis. Oddly enough, what bothers Schreber is not the withering away of his own male genitalia, or even the blossoming of “nerves of voluptuousness” throughout his entire body, but only the use to which his new body will be put. For Schreber, these are two potential uses of his body, one eschatological and holy, the other ephemeral and unsavory. Whether the sex he has with God is procreative or merely pleasurable torments Schreber; hence the oscillation of Ariman’s two uttered phrases “voluptuousness has become God-fearing” and “Excite yourself sexually”—expressions denoting Madonna and whore states (252). What he can tolerate, even desire, is becoming a uterus; what he cannot stomach is the chance that God might once again misunderstand him and view him as no more than vulva.

Ultimately, Schreber the scientist prevails, fabricating meaning from the miracles under which he suffers by way of an inventive neurology according to which a proprietary voluptuousness belonging only to women is made accessible to him. An M-to-F who retains his male character throughout, and who seems to encounter the most

voluptuousness when he expels feces, not when his newly developed genitalia are put to use, Schreber dreams of an orgasm spread across his body while never achieving it; as such, he prefigures even Lacan, for whom *jouissance* transcends mere “oases of pleasure” for a wholly sentient bodily surface area.<sup>14</sup> Why God never defiles him, or why there is not even the presence of a sexless conception as occurs in Christianity, are questions never answered: Schreber worries about the sexual uses to which his new body might be put for nothing. While various men, of course, do magically appear inside Schreber, as when, in the most famous instance, a gaggle of Benedictine monks takes up residence inside his head, along with Flechsig phantasms and a wandering von W, who functions as a constant reminder of the chronic urge to masturbate, none appear to be sex offenders:

The Jesuit Father S. in Dresden, the Ordinary Archbishop in Prague, the Cathedral Dean Moufang, the Cardinals Rampolla, Galimberti and Casati, the Pope himself who was the leader of a particular ‘scorching ray,’ finally numerous monks and nuns; on one occasion 240 Benedictine Monks under the leadership of a Father whose name sounded like Starkiewicz, suddenly moved into my head to perish therein (57).

Male Matroyoshka doll, Schreber is XY through and through, despite the transmigratory eventuality of becoming a Hyperborean woman or sprouting pleasure neurons. Fusing neurology with both personal history as well as German, cosmological and religious history, Schreber is a battlefield on which various factions play. Subject to miracles and counter-miracles in dazzling succession, Daniel Paul Schreber does, indeed, give birth, but not to a race of giants. Rather, his child is the fundamental worldview of the

paranoiac, a tight, tidy clockwork whose greatest miracle is the genesis of a self that is the whole of the cosmos.

### **Psychotainment**

If post-structuralism is right in its disavowal of originality and truth, then every reading is a misreading in one way or another; consequently, it appears impossible to get angry with Freud for his uses of Schreber, just as it would from this perspective be gauche to fault him for getting Leonardo da Vinci's history wrong in *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*. Here, despite the fact that so much of this work hangs on Freud's mistranslation of the word "vulture" (he interprets *nibbio* as "vulture," rather than "kite"), the fantastic system that Freud himself is able to construct based upon something so minor as a detail from a dream makes even fractals seem simple.<sup>15</sup> One good *wahnbildungsarbeit* deserves another, and so it is with Schreber that two of the world's greatest system-builders come into contact on a madman's heated page, warm from the glow of miraculated embers. Although Freud will ignore much of Schreber's experience, naturally focusing on the imagined scene of emasculation central to Schreber's encounter with his strange and sadistic God, he is still correct in his identification of Schreber as one for whom delusions can sediment into glorious structures more compact ("condensed") and regulated than a Ptolemaic solar system, yet still vibrant and surprising nonetheless.<sup>16</sup> Since for Freud the human narrative rests upon a sexual dynamic informing all aspects of daily life, it is impossible that Schreber escape

such categorization. And so Freud will fix his gaze on Schreber's homosexual attachment to his evil genius therapist, averting his eyes from both the sensual excesses of Schreber's text in and of itself, as well as the material conditions of Schreber's imprisonment and the effect these facts of his existence exert upon Schreber's own mental development—for example, the connection between his isolation, as detailed by his maps of “God's Nerve Centers,” and the fantasy that the human race has followed Cuvier's hypothesis and gone extinct, or the impact that being isolated in the women's wing could have had upon his gender identity (72).

The fact that delusions can form intricate structures following idiosyncratic yet well defined rules seems to be Schreber's gift to posterity. For a world committed to projects of self-fashioning, as has been shown by the work of Michel Foucault regarding the care of self, Stephen Greenblatt on self-construction in the Renaissance, and Charles Taylor on “sources of the self” within modernity, a self as exotic as Schreber's will function as a role model of sorts. He has certainly been the inspiration behind Deleuze and Guatarri's concept of the *corps sans organs*, his own philosophical fame emerging as the greatest miracle of all, proof that his confessionality has transcended even Freud's attempts at containment. Recalling other inordinately complicated systems, such as that developed by William Blake, for whom an entire pantheon of personalities and types is suspended on axes marked “innocence” and “experience” in prophetic works like *Jerusalem* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, the self as fashioned by Schreber and re-fashioned by Freud enters the public domain as world-historical and exemplary. While of course Freud could never have predicted what would happen once, a century later, the camera's lens turned itself toward Bedlam, he is in a sense responsible for

inventing the very system by which the fame of lunacy could be launched and appreciated. With the advent of contemporary phenomena like Oprah Winfrey product and protégé *Dr. Phil*, who has graced the airwaves of American television since September 2002, textual pyrotechnics, such as those housed in Schreber's glistening prose, give way to visual histrionics, as audiences across the globe gasp in horror when a father takes a lie detector test which will prove whether or not he has been fondling his daughter's "penis," or shake their heads in disbelief when a misandrous shopaholic accused of buying her teenage children porn reads off items on a recent credit card bill. Scene such as these should come as no surprise to creatures of modernity (even of that modernity is "post-"). For centuries, the psychotic has been entertaining—perhaps even trephined cave people were the court jesters of their time, Paleolithic images awaiting discovery by the work of future spelunkers. While it would take Romanticism proper to turn the monster, blood-sucker or the demented into a viable counter-hero, such a development could never have taken place without the installation of subject-centered reason at the core of a culture committed to progress. Where we have finally arrived, terms like "repression," "transference" or "countertransference" are less meaningful than what can happen on a stage when human nerves are stripped raw of even their myelin sheaths and left to fester under harsh studio lights. Kleptomaniacs, sexual predators and binge eaters sell Nesquik and Geico insurance, placing themselves exactly where they belong: next to cartoon bunnies and talking geckos. Were he alive, Schreber would be there, too, tooting on his ocarina and rebounding with voluptuousness.

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## TV-ography

*Dr. Phil*. “The Lie Detector Tests Part 2” (11/7/06); “The Lie Detector Tests Part 1” (11/6/06); “Shocking Accusations” (11/3/06); “Alex Turns 18” (follow-up with the Anorexic Bride), (5/16/06); “Shopping Intervention: The Aftermath” (1/26/06); “A Shopping Intervention” (11/4/05); “Extreme Food Obsessions” (11/3/05). All CBS.

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<sup>1</sup> In *Heterologies*, Michel de Certeau outlines other psychoanalytic crises within the work of Freud. For example, although he acts the part of anthropologist in a work such as *Totem and Taboo*, he performs no exotic field work, deriving his complex theory of a totemic root for phobic behavior, as well as his story of the murder of the primal father, from the reports of other anthropologists. Similarly, he derives his theory of paranoia from a literary analysis of Schreber’s memoirs, not from direct observance of the man. Regarding the relationship between the *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) and *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences), see Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Helen Vendler discusses the Freudian Lyric in her *The Given and the Made*.

<sup>2</sup> I take my sense of the grotesque from the work of Wolfgang Kayser in his *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*. In this work, Kayser meticulously traces the development of this important aesthetic category from Raphael onward.

<sup>3</sup> Paradoxically, Binswanger concurs with Bleuler regarding Ellen’s schizophrenia (*schizophrenia simplex*), using Janet’s case study of Nadia to illustrate why exactly neither woman suffers from anorexia (331-337). Still, Binswanger provides intricate details of Ellen’s personal battle with consumption, including here poetry as evidence of her split between wispy ethereality and Jewish terrestriality, thereby providing a very detailed anorexic artifact. His analysis of West’s hunger as “existential craving,” or *Süchtigkeit*, represents the *Dasein* of starvation (345-347).

<sup>4</sup> Schreber mentions Röntgen rays in particular, connecting them with memory, history and materiality: “During the first years of my illness it would in my opinion have been an easy matter by a thorough examination of my body with the help of medical instruments and above all with Roentgen-Rays (not then discovered) to demonstrate the most obvious changes in my body, particularly the injuries to my internal organs which in other human beings would have been fatal. If it were possible to make a photographic record of the events in my head, of the lambent movements of the *rays coming from the horizon*, sometimes very slowly, sometimes—when from a tremendous distance—incredibly swiftly, then the observer would definitely lose all doubt about my intercourse with God” (303).

<sup>5</sup> For Santner. Schreber’s narrative is both a secret history of modernity as well as a secret history of Nazism. As Dinnage elucidates in her introduction to Schreber’s memoir, the “household totalitarianism” of Daniel Puul’s father, Moritz Schreber, helps to clarify Schreber’s delusions, as so many of these involve sensations of restraint and loss of control and as such represent a dissolution of Moritz’s famous system of discipline. They are, in essence, a symbolic and sexualized reconstitution of his restraining device, the Schreber *Geradehalter*. Freud, too, notices the inherent Nazism of Schreber’s delusions, noting that even in Schreber’s heaven, the darker, Semitic God, Ariman, is inferior to the lighter Persian-Aryan God Ormuzd.

<sup>6</sup> One problem with Jung’s collective Unconscious is its apparent Lamarckian dimension. In Darwin’s theory of evolution (but not necessarily competing theories, such as Bergson’s), there is no way for present modifications of plant or animal matter to be transmitted to future generations. Consequently, Jung’s psychic model presents the problem of inheritance: how can a cultural memory be stored and passed along via DNA? The paradigm of the Archetype (e.g., the Mandala, or the young dying god), reveals a basic structure to human consciousness, an organization which compels the psyche to think certain patterns (e.g., a world-dissolving flood). “Categorical” and “Noematic,” these structures infuse human thought with a recognizable and transmissible form.

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<sup>7</sup> One critical difference between Dr. Phil's case studies and Freud's is that Dr. Phil's do not launch new illnesses, but rather redefine existing problems according to modern interpretations. What is not new about Dr. Phil is the diagnosis—for example, anorexia. His novelty stems from the ways in which his television program and publications personalize a type of pre-existing psychological condition: on his show, the professional anorexic serves her runaway husband with divorce papers.

<sup>8</sup> For Sartre, *négligés* are “little pools of nothingness” which interfuse daily human life—for example, the absence of a friend, the subsumption of a detail by “ground” in the emergence of “figure.” As such, they run counter to Heidegger's conception of nothingness as the void along which human existence is stretched.

<sup>9</sup> In Schreber's cosmography, the figures of therapists Flechsig and von Weber loom large. Since it is Flechsig, the therapist treating him for his initial breakdown, whom Schreber accuses of the very “Soul Murder” which sets in motion Schreber's unmanning, it is Flechsig who becomes the tormentor. At points, there are even a Superior and Middle Flechsig (113); these effect the miraculous “Tying-to Rays” and “Tying-to-Celestial-Bodies” by which Schreber's own body is stretched across the heavens and connected to the universe. In addition, Schreber also achieves nerve contact with Flechsig's ancestor Daniel Fürchtgott Flechsig, whose presence reveals a rift between the Flechsig and Schreber families. “Little men” are entities (“Tested Souls”) who have been pared down to “one single nerve” (75).

<sup>10</sup> In her very Schreberian *Call Me Crazy*, Anne Heche metamorphoses into Celestia, a quasi-religious interplanetary traveler charged with writing a new Bible—curiously enough, in leather books she purchases at a Christopher Street sex shop. Laying out her new language, Heche clues her reader in to a revolutionary language not unlike Schreber's *Gründsprache*.

<sup>11</sup> Whether Ice Age (59) or syphilitic outbreak (79) have destroyed the human race, Schreber remains behind as Eternal Jew (60) to repopulate the earth. Following Georges Cuvier's theory of catastrophism, he posits himself as answer to mass extinction. Later, he is even given a “Jew's stomach,” this along with other physical tortures (a dissolved penis, a miracled coccyx, 151).

<sup>12</sup> Like St. Teresa of Avila, Schreber lays out a planar view of heaven. After expired humans become “Tested Souls” and are duly subjected to their respective ordeals, they return to occupy the Forecourts of Heaven, or *Verhöfe des Himmels*. Next to these are the Anterior Realms of God. In front of these, the Posterior Realms of God appear, these divided into the realms of Ormuzd and Ariman. Ormuzd orchestrates Schreber's *Entmannung*, while Ariman becomes a source of Zoroaster Rays.

<sup>13</sup> I can imagine no better visual analogue of Schreber's pesky birds than Paul Kale's *Twittering Machine* (1922). This painting depicts a mechanized bird gizmo twittering away rotely. While Klee bears no reference to Schreber, the painting does synchronicitously provide a perfect visual representation of Schreber's ornithological terror.

<sup>14</sup> For Lacan, the body originally experienced orgasm wholly, and only post-castration divided the torso into “oases of pleasure” (a penis, a clitoris). Passing from *jouissance* to mere *plaisir*, the body differentiates into zones of sexual stimulation and zones of sexual indifference—which, incidentally, become sexualized through the detours of the fetish.

<sup>15</sup> “For *nibbio* means “kite,” not “vulture,” and with that, the structure of speculation that Freud built on that miraculous bird, the vulture, collapses. But the paper retains its interest—for example, the idea that scientific inquiry begins with “the sexual researches of children,” or that the empiricist is a brooder by nature. As the editors of the Standard Edition rightly note, what remains intact is Freud's “detailed construction of Leonardo's emotional life from his earliest years, the account of the conflict between his artistic and his scientific impulses, the deep analysis of scientific theory” (Gay, xxiii).

<sup>16</sup> Toward the end of his exposition of Schreber's condition, Freud does come clean, admitting that his theory of paranoia was developed prior to his having read Schreber. This, taken along with the fact that he finds it more productive to examine “exciting causes” than Schreber's own words, demonstrates the value Schreber has for Freud and for psychoanalysis in general (II: Attempts at Interpretation, 110, 118). It thus should come as no surprise that “castration,” “father-complex” and “passive homosexuality” should be where Schreber leads him: Freud was already there.