

Hoarders and Their Relation to the Unconscious

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For all of us, not only hoarders, objects become infused with meaning, some with the past they allow us to keep present, to keep from having to mourn, and some with the future they might prepare us for—which

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not only has the fantasied talismanic power of bringing that future into being, but sometimes also a fantasy of reversing trauma. Trauma occurs when one is emotionally overloaded by an external event for which he or she is unprepared. There's the fantasy that if you're always prepared, you'll never be traumatized, no one will pull the rug out from under you because you're standing on ten rugs and you know it, because you put them there yourself.

When we hold onto objects we are holding onto memories, dreams, potentialities, moments of connection, power, success, possibility that we control—a shadow world of sorts, like a dream world with life's residue that comes to stand in for emotions we are able to both hold onto and keep at bay. In the same way that Freud, in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, understood the process of *joke work* by applying to it his theory for interpreting dreams, one might approach *hoard work* through the lens of *dream work* as well. The task of the dream is to keep the dreamer asleep—in order for the dream not to become disturbing and wake him, according to Freud, images get split—the latent content, the powerful emotion that stirs us, detaches from the manifest content, the neutral container for the emotion, which then makes its way into the dream as seemingly meaningless content that neither rouses the dream censor nor the dreamer.

Perhaps the task of hoarding is to protect another kind of sleep.

In *Gulliver's Travels*, the narrator encounters characters who want to abolish words and, since all words are names for things, they carry the objects they might need in conversation in sacks on their backs. The problem, for the wise and learned, the sage, for those who need many things to discuss what's on their minds, is that they sink under the weight of their packs.

Hoarders, too, are often wise and learned—"special people," as described by one of the experts on hoarding Barry Yourgrau spoke to, and not so different from collectors or installation artists. A hoarder's home is often a kind of sack containing things and possibilities that can't be

let go of, that may any day come into necessity. I had a patient who accepted the baby furniture and gear of a friend who had recently had a baby even though she was not having a baby in the immediate future and was single at the time. She held onto it for years. Holding onto the furniture was a concrete manifestation of holding onto the idea of having a baby and, at a certain point, letting go of this bulky space-occupying gear became equivalent to giving up the dream. The objects became the dream embodied. Just as words stand in for objects, objects can stand in for thoughts or wishes. But much as Freud describes happening in dream work, there's a similar kind of splitting here—what makes its way into the dream, what makes its way into the hoard, also keeps some other highly charged emotion that has been detached from the image or object, the latent content, at bay.

I recognize here what seems like a contradiction: the object is infused with emotion, the object keeps emotion at bay.

I have another patient, highly visual, creative, very concrete, a hoarder, who needs to see something to think about it. He keeps many objects, as you might imagine, in his sack. Yet what would happen, he's wondered, if there were no objects? Would there be no thoughts? This, we realized, was part of the fear—internal emptiness—that fueled his hoarding.

This fear of emptiness—*horror vacui*, which Yourgrau mentions in *Mess* in the context of the cluttered aesthetic of the Victorian era—also creeps up in sex, masturbation, particularly for men.¹ In anticipation of the emptiness that follows ejaculation, some hoard their semen, keep themselves from experiencing the *horror vacui* that follows. At one point in the book, Yourgrau describes bringing postcards back from Paris in the wrapping or bag he bought them in, and placing the precious parcel on top of one of his piles, as he put it, "withholding their full pleasure for later tapping." He says this "tickles a psychological nerve" like unopened Christmas presents "long past December 25 to keep that happy tension going. Pushing the tension even deeper: like bonsai-scale memory orgasms, forever delayed? Accent on forever."

The titillation of "bonsai-scale memory-orgasms, forever delayed" reminds me of Susan Sontag's call for an erotics of art in *Against Interpretation*—a call for art not to resolve programmatically, but to arouse and remain in that state of arousal. I'm also reminded of a narrative trope I've been

1. Agoston, T. (1946). The fear of post-orgastic emptiness. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 33, 197–214.

obsessed with for years in which a character, possessing a desire for a beloved, works toward obtaining that beloved that has been the obsessive object of fantasy until the moment of attainment, at which point he walks away (as in Nabokov's novella *Mary*). This dynamic is also similar to one described by a patient of mine in which he experiences intense pleasure in setting up an online date but feels immobilizing dread when the hour of the actual encounter arrives. It's not merely about prolonging the state of arousal, foreplay, as long as possible, but avoiding consummation, which brings with it evacuation and the void that potentially ensues.

A hoard similarly wards off emptiness, *horror vacui*, not only by keeping presents and "postcards in their wrappings and withholding their pleasure," or forever delaying "memory orgasms," but because it literalizes what Winnicott called the *holding environment*. It does this both in the sense that the inhabitant is held in the embrace of his hoard—Barry describes this as "massed objects as physical company, as nurturing consoling bulk: an environment playing mother's bosom" (216)—and also in the sense that Winnicott meant it, in which the analyst holds or contains all thoughts and emotions the patient brings into the room, including the beautiful, the ugly, the aggressive, and the repulsive. Hoarding does something very similar in that objects as thoughts carry within them a vast range of emotions but store those associations equally in space, often unweighted, the more and less valued beside each other, in an equalized holding pattern. At one point, Barry decides to look into the boxes containing his late father's things, supposedly under the piano. After managing, in dust mask and latex gloves, to get at the thirteen boxes under the piano, he discovers that those boxes are not *the* boxes. Yet, in the holding environment, they are, regardless of what they contain, nonetheless part of the "consoling bulk."

The enveloping pressure from the hoard—like the pressure, described by Agoston in "The Fear of Post-Orgastic Emptiness," applied to the penis to stave off ejaculation and the *horror vacui* that may follow (199)—is much like Temple Grandin's hug machine used to calm and contain autistic children. Grandin's machine was inspired by the observation on her aunt's farm that cattle, when placed in a V-shaped squeeze box meant to hold them still during vaccinations, would become visibly comforted, consoled. If one is held by the hoard, selects his or her objects

for contemplation, thinks the thoughts that correspond to the objects seen *only*, he or she thereby controls what fills the mind, allowing less of an opportunity for the mind to go somewhere that hasn't been curated. The latent content is buried—repression is achieved through a kind of cluttering out.

Perhaps what is so disturbing—which is to say, so captivating—about the show *Hoarders* is not only that it strives to reveal embarrassing and shameful aspects of human behavior (as does all reality TV), but that it takes the intimate holding environment of an individual, his or her carefully curated installation, and does not merely dismantle it in a decluttering way, but, as though it were a carefully built house of cards, pulls a card from the bottom so we see not the entire hoard fall to pieces, but rather the internal state of the individual. The hoarder is *unhoused* as is pretty much any reality TV character who moves into a temporary home for the duration of a show (or is a victim of torture, for that matter). This state of imbalance, provoked by what Foucault would call an "ordeal," is capitalized on because, in an Aristotelian sense, it becomes necessary for the viewer to disidentify with the character so that we can tolerate their downfall, their falling to pieces before our eyes, by showing situations so extreme that we can feel pity and, with it, the comforting knowledge that such a thing would never happen to us. The signifier for our disidentification is invariably shit—the three-foot mound of soiled adult diapers, the hoarded cats whose shit gives off fecal dust, the hoarded containers of bodily waste that, for seemingly incomprehensible reasons, do not get thrown out. These episodes allow us to indulge our voyeurism while suspending our empathy.

Were we given more of a history—especially where trauma was involved—it would be difficult not to feel for the hoarders on the screen. Barry recounts the case of a woman who had been sexually abused as a child and raped by an intruder as an adult. Her house, as Barry puts it, "became a chaotic bunker...which served both as a calamitous self-soothing and a protective bulk" (185). It was during the process of decluttering that she began to exhibit PTSD symptoms. It was then, I'm guessing, when the curated thoughts and emotions that the objects of the hoard were holding in place—and, as a result, in mind—were no longer there to provide a screen, that the previously cluttered-out thoughts, memories, and emotions flooded in. Aristotle believed there were no vacuums in nature because denser surrounding material would immediately rush in to fill any void. This rushing-in is perhaps another aspect of the *horror vacui* of a hoarder,

that the emptiness will necessarily become filled—that thoughts and emotions the individual hasn't carefully curated, has not prepared for, may overtake them—a kind of memory orgasm par excellence with the potential to retraumatize.

Also critical in thinking about hoarding and PTSD is the hoard's relationship to time. As, according to Freud, there is no sense of time in the unconscious, a hoard similarly has the potential to detemporalize. It's striking, in fact, how frequently newspapers are among the hoarded objects. Yourgrau recounts Andy Warhol's hoarder-like tendencies and how he made art, "Time Capsules," out of "hoarder's potpourri"—he "would place bits and pieces from his

daily life" into cardboard boxes, sometimes merely sweeping into a box what was on his desk (166). After he died, the 612 time capsules he'd accumulated were for sale—all at the same price—but buyers wouldn't know what they were getting until they opened them. Some were filled with artworks while others contained "nothing but newspaper clippings" (167). And this, too, is part of the *hoard work*, creating a *time capsule* that holds in place particular moments—along with the feelings and thoughts associated with them—in order to hold out others. So you know what you're getting. ■

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Untitled, Nam Ha, 1994

The Psychopathology of Everyday Object Life: Some Reflections on Barry Yourgrau's Mess: One Man's Struggle to Clean Up His House and His Act Psychoanalysis

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I have been obstinately watching the TV series *Hoarders* that Barry Yourgrau thinks is an absolute abomination. It is. And I am guilty of the indulgence. But the range of reactions was so intense: overwhelmed,

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fascinated, horrified, disgusted, outrage mixed with a sense of moral superiority, or, on the other hand, compassion, or depression, and finally a need to stop, the strong urge to turn away—it was all too much. The show turns on the spectacle of the hoarded mess, piles of things, filth, the obstinate refusal of the person to let anything go, which leads to a crisis that erupts, at which point the shrinks are called in, none of whom I can easily identify with, but whose encounter with the so-called hoarder fascinated me. Who was going to win the battle? Whose idea of value would rule the day? And finally, who would mete out the punishment best? Most often, the hoarder wins. Their refusal is unimpeachable, as is their logic—why should you determine what stays and what goes, what is clean and what is filth?

But it is not this horrific spectacle as such that I want to think about, but the way in which the spectacle of any “reality TV” show, any serial—the again and again—allows the viewer to experience the range of guttural reactions against something felt to be on the outside, over there, while hiding from them that this turns on a deep identification. I think that's the secret power of the dissociation in watching reality TV that we can easily say isn't real or isn't reality really—certainly not my reality, I'm not a hoarder. In fact, I think there is a reality on display, perhaps a different kind of reality, what Freud called psychic reality, the theater of unconscious desire. I don't pass judgment on this phenomenon. Certainly it's a spinoff of something as old as theater itself, though the word *reality* was never attached to theater. I will say that it wasn't until I read Barry Yourgrau's book—an object composed of words, an investigation into hoarding, a memoir, that is very funny at times, and also moving—that I was able to think about hoarding a little bit more, and more intimately. What does hoarding have to do with me?

But first, Freud. The only specific mention of hoarding as psychopathology in Freud is in 1892 in Draft K of his unfinished

“Neurotica,” essentially his attempt at creating a DSM. Under obsessional neurosis, which Freud characterizes as a structure based on a traumatic kernel of actively experienced pleasure and then conscious shame, he lists the defenses against this trauma as conscientiousness, obsessional ideas and acts and feelings, inhibitions or compulsions that allow nothing to happen, and finally obsessional brooding, obsessional hoarding, obsessional drinking, and obsessional ceremonials. It's curious that Freud never talks about hoarding again. One might speculate that this is because once the psychosexual roots of obsessional behavior are found, hoarding is closely allied with the retention and expulsion of feces and vicissitudes of toilet training, what Freud calls anal erotism, and hoarding is simply the inverse face of the fastidiousness and orderliness of the more general obsessional structure. Hoarding encapsulates the moment when order becomes disorder; when the control over one's feces reverses course, when compliance demanded by society is converted into pure defiance. To put it succinctly: civilized man has forgotten how exciting shit can be.

There is a fascinating footnote that I found from Freud's 1908 paper “Character and Anal Erotism” where Freud recounts a conversation with a patient about that patient's friend who he says agreed with most of what Freud had to say in *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, except the bit about the child who refuses to empty his bowels when put on the pot, deliberating about whether putting up with this restriction was going to impede his sense of freedom, in particular his freedom over his own pleasure, which he was anxious not to miss out on. Freud's patient says the man found the passage so grotesque and comic that he laughed for nearly a quarter of an hour. The two men laughed about this other man's laughter and then carried on talking. Freud writes,

About twenty minutes afterwards, as we were having some cocoa, he suddenly remarked without any preliminary: “I say, seeing the cocoa in front of me has suddenly made me think of an idea that I always had when I was a child. I used always to pretend to myself that I was the cocoa-manufacturer Van Houten and that I possessed a great secret for the manufacture of this cocoa. Everybody was trying to get hold of this secret that was a

boon to humanity but I kept it carefully to myself.” Laughing, and without thinking at the time that my words had any deep meaning, I said: “Wann haut'n die Mutter?” [“When does mother smack?”]. (1908/1959, pp.171–172)

Isn't this a wonderful footnote? Beyond the hidden industrial dream, clearly anal, there is the great secret that needs protection, the secret power which one desperately wants to keep for oneself rather than give up as a boon to humanity! Further, there is Freud's accidental interpretation in the form of a pun on the name Van Houten, changing the great cocoa manufacturer to a question around the smack of a mother.

If anality is the refusal to have restrictions placed on one's personal freedom, an unwillingness to miss out on any pleasure, this is especially so when it comes to a pleasure that is *for* the other. The anal erotic character will keep for himself what he likes, accumulate all that he imagines as his, retained as his grand secret. Anal loss is tied to the gift, “poop for mommy,” and is a break in this closed loop. The distinction of value—shit or gold—and the submission to the dictates of control over one's body, form a complex organization that Freud would reference for the rest of his life as an intimate part of the foundation of civilization. Lacan has said that Rome was bound to be the first great civilization since it streamlined sewer systems. Civilization means knowing what to do with waste, to put some things out of circulation, and others into it, a kind of gift that takes flight when accepting a certain measure of loss. So embedded in the question of hoarding, collecting, mess, clutter, rests a question regarding civilized life.

Certainly the problems surrounding the pleasure of accumulation, the difficulty of loss or letting go, find new vicissitudes in a 21st century throw-away culture that encourages us to spend, spend, spend in the sublime heights of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous waste in global capitalism. Hidden away, in some nook and cranny, we find the hoarder, living in a private space that is a shrine, as Yourgrau puts it, to reuse, an “almost-organizer” whose organization protocols grow delirious, a la Kafka, and seem designed to hinder all action; a world of reluctance “to do anything” except tend to the creation of a nest that protects a refusal to let anything go. The control of the hoarder creates, little by little,

a visible spectacle where what is kept and what is garbage are rendered indistinguishable such that, finally, we can see human creation as creation: there is no natural order, we've made it all up, one's man's gold is another man's shit. This is the tragicomedy of everyday object life that we live out and which will outlive us.

It is important to talk about global capitalism, but perhaps as precisely postindustrial, beyond the Van Houten cocoa factory, twisting Freud's story of anality. Hoarding, beginning in the 18th century, has grown exponentially more delirious, with specific outlines that may provide an angle on



Untitled, Mekong Delta, 1995

today's world, in particular contemporary neoliberalism. I found a powerful parable in the example of animal hoarders, a pig hoarder in particular. I was watching a *National Geographic* special on hoarding and there was a section on animal hoarders. The trouble is that the animal hoarders lose track of the difference between trying to save something and where saving bleeds into animal cruelty: is it a sanctuary, a farm, a factory, or a slaughterhouse? The image the hoarder is trying to shore up is one of themselves as animal savior, which eventually reverses into its opposite; saving becomes collecting, an act that happens at the animal's

expense. The woman in this documentary had hoarded 900 pigs in her home that she called “Pig-Tail Haven,” letting them live in her house which became a cesspit of infection because of the sheer amount of feces. The pigs eventually contracted an incurable form of rabies. The local health and sanitation department ordered the pigs to be gassed in a makeshift gas chamber created in a semi truck that they parked in front of her house. At the end, in shock, rocking in her wheelchair, she kept saying to herself, “there will be more pigs to save, there will always be more, this time I will know how to do it right.”

It is this strange picture of modernity that may lie behind certain changes in aesthetics that one might call a move from the almost too-much that is the experience of sublime beauty, to the absolutely too-much that is the art of the monstrous, which plays with our experience of horror and disgust. In my book on Hamlet with Simon Critchley, *Stay, Illusion!*, we wrote: “This disgust might not simply repulse or repel us. It might also wake us up. This is the force of the uncontainable that we find in tragedy, whether ancient or modern ... the violence of art against the violence of reality” (2014, p.218). Art must tear away the screens of a suppos-

I was so devastated by this story that seemed to me the perfect parable of the neoliberalism of today: the mania to save the other, to protect their “rights,” which is an act that ultimately is done in order to shore up our identity as humanitarian, to such an extreme that one only finds endless justifications of abuse. This is the casualness with which we treat casualties in this effort to “save”—all the collateral damage. This is what has been referred to as “bare” or “base” life that imposes itself in neoliberalism, especially in the reappearance of the concentration camp, the attempt to separate out again what is life and what is a body, what is the target of regulation and order and hygiene.

edly civilized life—undo the force of dissociation at work in the mechanisms of identification and dis-identification common to reality TV and neoliberal politics. Indeed one of the things that fascinated me in Barry Yourgrau's book was his confession that he hoards plastic bags, shopping bags, and boxes—the containers that were never able to contain the uncontainable, the containers that mark our acts of consumerism, in particular as act, an act beyond the object, an act perhaps done now without regard even or care for the object in itself.

I'd like to end with some thoughts on time. One thing I learned from this book, and the many interviews with hoarders in it

that form a rich phenomenology of hoarding, was that this isn't merely the failure to act, the old Hamlet obsessional quandary. It is that. But the picture is much more complex. Every object saved contains an intention. There is hoarding of the past, and hoarding of the future. Hoarding of the past includes memorabilia, souvenirs, emblems of previous acts, frozen in time. Anything can be a souvenir of any moment, an object revered with nostalgia. Any object, any thing, can be emblazoned with this symbolism and archived away. A patient, in a particularly touching moment, told me that he couldn't throw away seven years of the *Times Literary Supplement*, roughly 406 issues—all available online—because at one time they were all he had. They were his friends.

Objects can also be hoarded in the name of a future intention, an act postponed, unrealized but imagined, dreamed and wished for, but un-actualized. Any

object can come to us, as it were, from the future. England's most extreme hoarder saved broken lightbulbs because he heard that one day they might invent a machine that would fix them.

Meanwhile, the present slips away as this past and future amass to bury it. So I have to confess to a minor hoarding incident, recently discovered, with Barry Yourgrau's book in the air. I was doing a spring cleaning with my best friend who kept opening drawers and asking me what all this "crap" was. What is this stuff? What is it for? I began to justify what all of it was—most of the objects concerned ideas I had for bizarre projects I wanted to do with my son, many of which involved some idea of joint commerce, serial art projects that could be sold on street stands and the like, some version of the cocoa factory fantasy.

But I happened upon a peculiar object, a red wooden block with a muted bell inside

that let off a gentle jingle. I found this block on the street and began carrying it around with me in my purse, till it made its way into one of these drawers. It had most likely fallen off of a baby's toy. It was an object that had no future or past intention consciously attached to it, which is why it stuck out among all these other objects. It was at this point that I realized that I was saving all these things, not just for my son, but for another child that might come along and which hasn't. "Leave my sad drawers alone!" I protested loudly to my best friend as I began to throw everything away. ■

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Lacan on Madness

Derek HOOK & Alan BRISTOW

The parsimony of the Lacanian diagnostic framework—which divides psychic life into a threefold schema of neurosis, perversion, and psychosis—seems to risk *under-differentiation* of the last of these three categories. The point seems to have been

Lacan on Madness: Madness, Yes You Can't
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Manya Steinkoler
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conceded by Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan's son-in-law and heir apparent, who remarked some years ago during a Paris seminar on ordinary psychosis: "Psychosis is a continent." It is, of course, well-known that Lacanians reject as structurally unfounded the notion of a "borderline" personality. The problem is thus clear enough: an incredibly wide range of ostensibly psychotic phenomena come to be categorically grouped under a very broad theoretical formulation, namely that of the foreclosure of the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father.

This is not to suggest that there are not very lively debates about which aspect of Lacan's work one should focus on in conceptualizing psychosis today, or that the rival concepts of ordinary psychosis and actual neurosis are not also being discussed and clinically applied. This being said, the secondary literature available in English that adequately differentiates between

melancholia, schizophrenia, paranoia psychosis, ordinary (or "quiet") psychosis, and manic-depressive psychosis, is sparse.

This points us to the first crucial contribution of *Lacan on Madness*: the volume covers an impressive cross-section of specific types of psychosis. It includes illuminating contributions on manic-depressive psychosis (by Darian Leader), melancholia (Russell Grigg), schizophrenia (Manya Steinkoler), and actual neurosis (Paul Verhaeghe), in addition to discussions on a series of importantly related topics such as psychotic transference (Jean Allouch), suicide (Richard Boothby), narcissistic neurosis (Hector Yankelevich), and hysteria (Clause-Nöele Pickmann). The specificity of such accounts means that readers interested in Lacanian conceptualizations of psychosis will no longer need to rely on generalized formulas.

The parameters of the book also allow for a far broader interpretation of psychosis within particular historical and cultural dimensions. Indeed, the very title of the book—opting for the more abstract term *madness*—raises questions as to how such phenomena can be understood outside of the strictly clinical domain. As such, editors Gherovici and Steinkoler open up potential lines of dialogue with the critical psychiatry movement and the "politics of mental health" in general. Madness, we are reminded, occasions considerable attention within artistic or literary works.

The book's introductory chapter (by Patricia Gherovici and Manya Steinkoler) provides a wonderfully clear overview of a series of crucial Lacanian postulates and positions—informative and accessible, I should note, to non-Lacanian—which are of considerable importance for working clinically with psychosis:

Since repression does not operate in psychosis, we are not talking about a divided subject as we would in neurosis; there is no "un"-conscious as such. Actually, the psychotic is spoken by the Other, as manifested in the delusions, usually experienced as thoughts coming from the exterior, imposing themselves from without. The psychotic is subjected to the Other without mediation through intruding ideas, hallucinations, voices, imposed thoughts and commands. (p.3)

Delusions, Gherovici and Steinkoler remind us, open "a direct access to the unconscious as the discourse of the Other" (p.3) and can, as such, be considered an attempt at a cure. To understand a delusion, as Lacan does, as metaphor, highlights both "its palliative function and its creative aspect"; it demonstrates, furthermore, how a delusional system of thought "can compensate for an experience of collapse" (p.3). As Steinkoler asserts in a subsequent chapter (a vital point in our DSM-dominated era of

mental health): "symptoms" are not simply the characterizing features of disorder, but must be understood as *a way of making sense of senselessness* that require the patient and meticulous work of analysis. This premise alone marks out Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis from other competing bodies of knowledge on psychopathology and doubtless provides a degree of theoretical value to

symbolic location from which identification might become possible.

One of the most important contributions to the field of contemporary Lacanian diagnostics is Paul Verhaeghe's retrieval of the Freudian notion of actual pathology. This concept seems, in retrospect, particularly prescient, and appropriate for the conceptualization of a variety of

in understanding "quiet" or "ordinary" forms of psychosis. What is true of psychosis is true also of actual neurosis: no internal psychological processing is active, there are no symbolically coded symptoms amenable to interpretation, and drive impulses have not been adequately mediated. Verhaeghe makes the differential diagnostic distinction in the following way:



Untitled, *Soc Son*, 1996

the Lacanian orientation as a whole.

As is well known, Freud declared that psychotics were not suitable patients for psychoanalysis inasmuch as they were not thought able to form a suitable transference to the clinician. The question of the nature of transference in psychosis thus becomes a pressing issue for any psychoanalytic investigation of madness. Jean Allouch takes up this issue, insisting in an apparent contradiction of Freud that a viable form of transference *can* occur in work with psychotics, provided the direction of this transference is reversed. So, rather than the case of the analyst as the "subject supposed to know," it is *the patient* who knows and the analyst who assumes the position of the "secretary of the alienated." Eschewing any semblance of authority, it is the analyst's task, in listening, in noting and reiterating the fragmentary set of experiences related by the psychotic, to gradually assist them in building a stable

non-neurotic complaints. Clinicians today are confronted with a very different spectrum of symptoms from those that populated Freud's famous neurotic case studies. Today, says Verhaeghe,

[i]nstead of phobic anxiety, we encounter panic disorders; instead of conversion symptoms we find somatization and eating disorders; and instead of acting out we are confronted with aggressive and sexual enactments, mostly in combination with self-mutilation and drug abuse. . . . Today we are dealing with a promiscuous, aggressive and/or self-mutilating borderline patient with a complex traumatic history, who nourishes an addiction in addition to eating disorders. (pp.68–69).

Hence Verhaeghe's recourse to the notion of *actual* as opposed to *psycho*-neurosis: the former proves a more enabling concept

[There] are disorders whose cause can be found at the level of psychic elaboration, representational and defensive, of infantile sexuality. The accompanying symptoms are signifying, and the typifying characteristic for this group is a defense against an inner conflict concerning sexual desire. . . . [The] cause [of actual neuroses] is similarly located at the level of the drive, but specifically relates to the patient's present life, not the past. Symptoms are limited to bodily phenomena, unprocessed anxiety and somatic anxiety equivalent, and have no defensive significance. (p.71)

It is for this reason that those psychological problems that seem to bypass symbolization and elude interpretative treatment strategies—panic attacks, forms of somatization, addiction—are typically considered instances of *actual* as opposed to *psycho*-neurosis. Verhaeghe stresses the