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Tausk's influence machine within structuralist ideas in psychiatry and in psychoanalysis

Yorgos Dimitriadis

The “place” of the influencing machine in the psychiatry of its time

Victor Tausk presented his famous paper, pretty much his swansong, on the 6th and the 30th January 1919 during two sessions of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association (Assoun, 1978, p.21). It deals with the evolution of a form of delusion of persecution into schizophrenia. Firstly, we will attempt to place the paper within the context of the psychiatry of the time, which, according to the classification of Georges Lanteri-Laura (Lanteri-Laura 1998), coincides with the end of the period of what he designates as *second paradigm of psychiatry* (*paradigm* according to T. Kuhn (Kuhn 2000)). According to Lanteri-Laura, this paradigm starts in 1854, the year that Jean-Paul Falret, opponent to the uniqueness of mental disorder, wrote his paper “Of the inexistence of monomania”. The phrenologists of the time were attempting to describe and categorise mental disorders in relation to each one's semiology, evolution and aetiology. Jean-Paul Falret's circular madness, madness with two forms of Baillarger and Kraepelin's manic-depressive madness are representative types of this period, during which insanity has been also considered regarding its evolution. The notion of the evolution of delusion in psychosis, from an initial stage into a subsequent one, could already be found in previous authors, like Joseph Guislain (Bercherie 1980, pp. 60-61) (founder of Belgian psychiatry) and his concept of “initial *phrenalgy*” (1852): a diffuse sensation of anxiety and moral pain which consequently engenders corresponding delusional representations. Guislain influenced Wilhelm Griesinger, a central figure of psychiatry of the time, and author of the first systematic psychiatric manual (1845). According to Paul Bercherie (Bercherie 1980, p.62),

Griesinger's theory on the "ego's" transformations in delusion influenced Freud, whose copy of Griesinger's manual contained extensive annotations on the pages that dealt with the "ego". In France, Charles Lasègue and Valentin Magnan, in the middle and the end of the 19th century respectively, had described, each in his own way, the case of chronic delusion: by way of a progression of three periods (Lasègue 1852)¹ for the first and a systematic evolution (Magnan 1998)² through four successive phases for the second.

This second paradigm followed the first one, which, always according to Lanteri-Laura, began in 1793 when Philippe Pinel was appointed to the Bicêtre Hospital and became the first to include madness in medicine as a mental illness: it was called *alienation* and required internment in an institution. The third era began in 1926, year of the Lausanne congress where Eugen Bleuler held his conference on the subject of schizophrenia, and ended in 1977 with the death of Henri Ey. During that third paradigm, psychiatrists, often influenced by the Theory of Form (*Gestalt-theorie*) and the so-called "globalist neurology" (Goldstein 1983), sought each clinical entity's specific psychopathological element, in an attempt to conceive each psychopathology in its wholeness (*im Ganzheit*). The distinction, by Eugen Bleuler (Bleuler 2013)³, of schizophrenia symptoms into "fundamental and subordinate" ones pertains to the predominant trend of the time. Eugène Minkowski's (Minkowski 1968) "loss of vital contact with reality", "the flight of ideas in mania" developed by Ludwig Binswanger in his book *Über Ideenflucht* (Binswanger 2000), and the "dissolution of conscience and personality" – in acute and chronic psychosis respectively – in Henri Ey's organodynamic theory (Ey 2000) are part of that trend as well. Whereas in the second paradigm, a particular importance was given to description, with the third paradigm,

¹ Persecutory delusion with progressive evolution: The precursory period, the developing period of the delusion and the final, without dementia, period.

² Chronic delusion with systematic evolution: At first, an incubation phase, then the delusion of persecution, then megalomania, and finally dementia.

³ Bleuler's lecture at the Lausanne Congress (1926).

the focus shifted to the structure, which is to say to the element that is ever-present despite the seemingly clinical diversity. Such a shift of focus is evident in Tausk's paper *The Influencing Machine*, which could be said to introduce with clarity the distinction between the clinically superficial (less important and secondary) and the unique process which is invariably present. This constant reproduction refers to the evolution of the clinical case itself, meaning the way that it manifests itself in the different variants of its clinical development, but also to the various cases that reproduce, often only in part, that same specific process. Ideally, but very rarely, a clinical case will present all the evolutionary stages of the process⁴. Still, when this rare situation arises, however unusual, it will allow us to watch, as if through some window, the cogwheels of all the other cases that present, partly or veiled, the same process. Therefore, this observation will allow us to pronounce the various cases as pertaining to the same group or structure.

In that aspect, the way Tausk approaches the matter of delusion resembles and at the same time transcends the “mechanistic” analysis applied to delusions by the French Gaëtan de Clérambault (Clérambault 1987; see also Lacan 1966b, p. 65)⁵ during the same period (1919-1927), with his concept of small mental automatism and the “type” of erotomania with its three successive stages (in standard situations, at any rate). The small mental automatism includes a series of phenomena which de Clérambault divides into positive and negative ones. The positive ones are a number of basic phenomena which manifest themselves as parasitic to the main thought process, as the *thought echo* for example. The negative ones comprise phenomena like inhibition or confusion. Finally, there are the “mixed” ones: for example, the *uncanny* feeling and the false identification of persons and situations. All these phenomena have in common the fact that they are all

⁴ A clinician will be able to observe them even more seldom.

⁵ Lacan singled him out as his only mentor in psychiatry (1966b[1949]), and referred to his work as the closest to a structuralist analysis of all the other attempts in French psychiatry Lacan (1966, p.65).

“without content” (*anidéiques*) and neutral from a sentimental point of view. According to de Clérambault, this fact confirms their mechanical origin and, as a consequence, allows him to state that psychosis that have automatism as their basis are kindred to psychosis of toxic or organic origin. Although these “elemental” phenomena appear suddenly at the beginning of the psychosis, the delusion is a construction surrounding these phenomena, which manifest themselves inside the consciousness and require an interpretation from the subject. Consequently, when delusion enters the picture, as a “hyper-structure”, psychosis is already established. Tausk, for his part, mentions the “without content” trait of phenomena in the case of patients who simply complain about a sensation of transformation, and sometimes, about phenomena of alienation of their mental and physical personality, without seeking its cause in some foreign and hostile force. Therefore, the influencing machine would consist in an eventual final stage that allows the patient to make sense of the primary “without content” phenomena of transformation sensation.

The influencing machine and structuralism in psychoanalysis

Thirty seven years later, in his seminar on psychosis, Jacques Lacan expanded this idea when he stated that “we encounter analogous structures [not only] in the composition, the motives, the theme of the delusion, [but also] on the level of the elemental phenomenon” (Lacan 1957-1958, p.28). Therefore, we may agree with Claude Rabant (Rabant 1990, p. 82) when he says that Tausk adopts a structuralist method before its time, even more so than de Clérambault (Hulak 2003)⁶. However, Lacan, and to a certain degree Tausk himself, unlike de Clérambault, considered delusion to be not the result of induction (i.e. the enclosure of the elemental phenomenon inside the personality), but the result of the

⁶ Whose study was already “structuralist” enough as Lacan did note; see also Hulak (2003).

same “structuring force” that creates the elemental phenomenon⁷. Nevertheless, the dissimilarity between Lacan and Tausk is considerable: it corresponds to the difference between psychoanalysis during Tausk’s period, i.e. psychoanalysis of the first topic, and psychoanalysis of the period of Lacan’s study of Freud’s work with the aid of Ferdinand de Saussure’s structuralist linguistics of the 50’s. Tausk tried to apply Freud’s theory on narcissism as an evolutionary stage of the libido (with the eventuality of a pause of the libido), that identification to the loved object and the mechanism of projection in paranoia, to Nathalia A.’s case, and by extension, to other clinical cases of influencing machine delusion⁸. Should be noted here the ground-breaking character of Tausk’s interest in psychosis at a time when psychoanalysts shrank from undertaking the psychoanalytic therapy of such cases. Tausk goes beyond the Freudian theory of the time and gives emphasis to the “identification to the body”, which is initially perceived as estranged and broken down – *membra disjecta* (cf. Lacan 1966a)⁹ –, before becoming complete – through the identification to the body – as a “psyche of the ego”; as what pre-existed as an auto-erotic investment of the body. This identification to the body will support the progressive construction of the machine, which will act as a projection (as well as an alienation) of the body parts¹⁰ and the related stimulations. Apart from the audacious distance Tausk takes from Freud’s theory when he questions the exclusively homosexual “choice” of the persecutor in paranoia, his theory on the “identification to the body” allows him to advance one step further than Freud regarding the psychoanalytic theory of psychosis. One could

⁷ Lacan also clarifies that: “here, the term *element* should be understood identical with the term *structure*, a differentiated structure, in reference to nothing else but its own self”. See Lacan (1957-1958, p. 34).

⁸ Tausk sought the causes of the mental disorder (in the specific case of schizophrenia) in the mental regression of the libido, which resulted from the non-evolution of a series of drives during childhood: as a result, in the event of an unsolved mental conflict during adult life, may appear secondary self-cure reactions of the psyche, but also the regression of other, normally evolved mental functions. The latter regress in order to adapt to the level of the impaired ones.

⁹ In reference to the *De Natura Rerum* by the Roman poet and philosopher Titus Lucretius Carus. This reminds us of Lacan’s mirror stage, see Lacan (1966a).

¹⁰ With as a model, the penis’ erection which impresses the little boy, being a part of his body he is unable to control.

situate him somewhere between Freud's theory on Schreber's psychosis (Freud 1945) (the psychotic judge upon whose memoirs he commented extensively) and Lacan's first theory on psychosis as he developed it in his third seminar (Lacan 1957-1958). Lacan, just as Freud before him, considers that the causality of psychosis rests on a mechanism other than repression, which regards neurosis, and which he will name *foreclosure* (as he translated the Freudian term *Verwerfung*). However, according to Lacan, what is foreclosed in psychosis is not homosexuality, but the function of the father (the signifier "*Name-of-the-Father*"). Whereas Freud attempted to explain psychosis within Oedipus, Lacan considered it to be outside Oedipus. Whereas the first resorted to grammar (denial, inversion, the projection of the sentence "I (a man) love him (a man)" (Freud 1945, p.299), the second made use of structuralist linguistics. To Lacan, the neurotic is represented by the signifier in order to preserve himself from the body's drive excitations. It is what he called "enjoyment of the Other". The psychotic, on the other hand, not having access to the function of the signifier, is forced to "complete the Other": Schreber is forced to complete God's incomplete messages, Nathalia A. (Tausk's patient) to complete the influencing machine, with an increasing number of pieces which become less and less anthropomorphic and which, in that way, situate pleasure at some secure distance from the psychotic subject. According to Lacan, this passive relation between the psychotic subject and the pleasure is "feminising": it is in that particular aspect that he detects the relation between psychosis with both homosexuality and transexualism, and not, as Freud, in some homosexual tendency which the psychotic subject dismisses. Consequently, Tausk had perceived the psychotic symptom's function as a "capacitor of pleasure" (Lacan 2004, p.90). Later on, other authors have attempted to show how the conception, or even the construction, of a machine-object by psychotics can function as a "compensation", i.e. as a self-cure which aims at concentrating pleasure in duplicate "energy capacitors" outside the body, like in the case of

Bruno Bettelheim's (Bettelheim 1969) autistic boy Joey and in the autism cases described by Jean-Claude Maleval (Maleval 2003). The latter states that the autistic subject is sometimes able to construct a "compensatory Other" which is made up of "signs"¹¹ that allow him to handle the Other of the linguistic code as an object he may control (i.e. photographic memory, numeral and date calculation, conceiving specific machines...).

Conclusion: plagiarism and the delusion of influence

This paper was made in order to situate, in a way, Tausk's paper (1919) on the influencing machine within the genealogy of psychiatric and psychoanalysis ideas, more particularly in relation to psychosis. In 1933, the essay was translated in English by Tausk's colleague and friend, Dorian Feigenbaum and appeared in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (Tausk 1933). Tausk's paper's first French translation appeared in 1958 in the journal *La Psychanalyse* (Tausk 2001), whose subject were psychosis, alongside Lacan's paper "On a Question Prior to Any Treatment of Psychosis" (1958), Gisela Pankow's paper on the treatment of a case of chronic of delusional psychosis by means of the dynamic structuration method, as well as several other papers dealing with the psychoanalytical treatment of psychosis. The paper's translation also amounts to recognition of Tausk's contribution to the psychoanalytical treatment of psychosis by the newly-formed *Société française de psychanalyse*, which was publishing that particular journal and gathered together those who were going to determine French psychoanalysis in the decades to come. At last, we can note, in unison with Rémi Tevissen (Dimitriadis 2013; Tevissen 2008), that organic theories in psychiatry¹² concerning mental automatism tend to have an objectivizing

¹¹ A sign pertains to a specific object, whereas a signifier to another signifier. This process carries on ad infinitum, uncontrollably in the case of psychosis (where the foreclosure *Name-of-the-Father* does not allow symbolic identifications).

¹² We referred to de Clérambault's theory, who nonetheless, in his last paper on mental automatism (), did not dismiss the possibility of non-organic causes when he was making the distinction between explanatory delusion and self-created – from the second personality – delusion. He also added that, concerning these phenomena, a causality of sentimental nature was not to be dismissed.

stance towards thought automatism phenomena, not unlike psychotics': they disregard the unconscious' ability to create such phenomena which indicate unconscious choices that the psychotic refuses to acknowledge as his own, just as Nathalia A. refuses to recognise herself (we may say *her subjectivity*) in the anthropomorphic machine she devised. In that aspect, Tausk's contribution with his paper *The Influencing Machine* might be considered as a landmark among theories concerning "mental automatism", just as Freud, inspired by the romantic philosophy of his time, and his theory on the unconscious as a form of creative automatism (see Lanteri-Laura 1992); or Lacan, influenced by the theories on cybernetics, in regard to the unconscious as a form of automatism which is structured like a language, and his interpretation of Aristotle's theory on *chance* (τύχη) and the *automaton* (αυτόματο) (Dimitriadis 2010). Finally, a given period may produce propitious conditions towards a contemporary discovery by several researchers, who, quite often, will accuse each other of stealing one's ideas. Such accusations were made by both Freud and Tausk against each other (Roazen 1990), and de Clérambault too had publicly accused Lacan of plagiarism during a meeting of the "Société médico-psychologique" (Roudinesco 1986, p. 124). As it has been observed (Gilbert 1976), it is quite singular that in both cases, the accusations occurred in relation to the subject of influence on thought. It could be inferred that the signifier "influence" may have actually influenced the parties involved. We may also mention (in accordance with Lacan) that the unconscious is the *social*, and each era is much more "responsible" for the birth of an idea than their respective authors. During the period of the invention of the telegraph, not only were there plenty of theories on delusions of influence from afar, but the delusions themselves also involved machines instead of the devil, animals or hypnosis. If indeed the unconscious is structured like a language and possesses "automaton" attributes, then it is probably no coincidence that it was discovered during the industrial revolution, and a little before the era of structuralism and cybernetics.

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Abstract: With the advance of industrialization during the late 19th century, the occident watched its everyday life become submerged by all sorts of mechanical devices and technological innovations. Delusions followed that societal process: machines, instruments and media became part of the delusions' content. The end of the century saw Freud

discovering psychoanalysis and the birth of the psychoanalytic movement. In the aftermath of WWI, a crucial time for the movement's expansion, an ambitious young psychoanalyst named Victor Tausk (1879–1919) attempted, against all odds, the first psychoanalytic treatment of psychosis. We propose an historical reconstruction of his pioneering contribution to the psychoanalysis of psychosis, giving emphasis on the further implications of his approach to the study of social sciences and ideas in general.

Key Words: Freud, Tausk, Lacan, industrial revolution, early psychoanalytic movement, psychiatry, psychosis, schizophrenia, influencing machine(s), automatism, structuration, plagiarism