

Andrew Rossabi

## Interview with Morton Schatzman

*Could you say something about the Arbours Association of which you're the chairman?*

We're setting up places for people in emotional distress to live outside the mental hospital system. We're offering people who want to live and work with people in emotional crisis the chance to do this. Our work starts from the view that mental illness is a hypothesis, which so far has not been proved. We have reason to think the whole system of seeing people as mentally ill, labelling them, and treating them that way, may tend to aggravate the 'mental illness' itself. We'd like to see what happens when we give people who might otherwise be called mentally ill a chance simply to live outside in the community at large, so to speak.

*On the lines of Kingsley Hall and Cooper's Villa 21?*

The intellectual context is similar.

*You don't believe in the concept of mental illness, that people are mentally ill in the same way as people are ill with TB or cancer?*

There's no doubt that mental illness is a social fact; all that is certain about mental illness is that some people assert other people have it. There are people who think they are ill when they are not, and people who ascribe illness, correctly or incorrectly, either to themselves or to other people. Somebody may be ill, not know it, and have no one ascribe to him that he is ill; somebody may not be ill, think he is, and have someone ascribe to him correctly that he is not ill; such a person is likely to be considered a hypochondriac. There are three categories here - the existence of the illness, the self-attribution, and the attribution by someone else. For instance, someone can have cancer, not know it, and have someone else ascribe it to him correctly.

Then there is a gambit that is frequently seen in relation to what is called mental illness - someone ascribes to an individual an illness which he assumes the individual is unconscious of. So far, the only certainty is that this gambit by the ascriber occurs. Theoretically, it comes down to how broadly or loosely one defines the term 'illness'; practically, to call people 'ill' who have no organic illness has enormous implications for their lives, for psychiatrists, and probably for everyone.

*Wasn't this procedure started by Kraepelin?*

He was one of its leading codifiers, but it didn't begin with him; it dates back to antiquity. Hippocrates used the word 'paranoia' to mean faultiness in mind: *para* means besides or out of and *nous* means mind. The institution of mental illness didn't blossom until about three hundred years ago. Thomas Szasz, the American psychoanalyst, has recently suggested that the institution of mental illness first arose with the decline of the persecution of witchcraft and heresy by the Inquisition, and that the one replaced the other.

*I think most people would go along with this in theory, but when actually faced with a person in a catatonic stupor, for example, it is hard not to see that person as ill, especially when that person's experience of himself is as ill. Dr. Joseph Berke was saying how upset certain so-called schizophrenics became when he started telling them they were not schizophrenics, that there was no such thing as schizophrenia. In his terms, they were invalidating themselves by their self-attribution of illness. However, people often do see their extreme suffering and unhappiness in terms of illness and disease. Even in Kraepelin's time bizarre hypochondriacal bodily sensations were a supposed symptom of schizophrenia, or dementia praecox as it*

*was called then. Could the concept of mental illness have a metaphoric, if not actual, validity?*

There is no reason to believe that 'patients' are likely to have more insight into the institution of mental illness than anyone else. There were certain persons who believed they were witches. Should we believe they were witches in 'reality' because they said they were? Would it not be more to the point to try to find out why they said or believed they were, while keeping in brackets the matter of whether they really were witches?

Consider someone who says he suffers from a bodily illness: whether you believe him or think he is a hypochondriac often depends on other evidence than simply his story. Someone who says about himself or someone else that he is mentally ill is deploying an analogy: a biological and medical analogy. Most, although not all, entities called mental illnesses are not biologically dysfunctional: for instance, the so-called sexual dysfunctions, the perversions. Psychiatry subsumes under its aegis most of the range of possible human sexual acts, yet none of them is biologically dysfunctional for the individual engaging in them.

*Still, many people would label such behaviour as sick in a moral, if not medical, sense.*

It might make someone else sick. That's a different matter. One has to distinguish between people who disturb other people and people who are disturbed. A person's behaviour may disturb other people but he is not disturbed about their disturbance; the other people may be disturbed that he is not disturbed about disturbing them, which also may not disturb him. It is possible he will only begin to be disturbed when other people begin to interfere in his life by taking some action against him. People who make other people feel sick are not necessarily sick. There ought to be a name for this manoeuvre: 'You make me want to vomit'.

*You've written a book on paranoia?*

Yes. I'm starting from a famous case Freud wrote about, the case of Schreber. Schreber was a German judge. He was nominated to the highest judicial position in Germany at a young age. In his forties and again in his fifties he had what people of his day, and people nowadays, would regard as a paranoid schizophrenic episode. In fact, he was considered a classic case of schizophrenia. Eugen Bleuler, who coined the term and developed the concept 'schizophrenia', drew heavily on Schreber's writing to illustrate the concept. Schreber wrote a classic autobiography called *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*; it's about his experiences while he was thought mad.

Freud never met Schreber, but he did an analysis of paranoia based on his reading of the *Memoirs*. Freud's views still influence many psychiatrists and most psychoanalysts in their thinking about paranoia. Freud's thesis is that paranoia arises as a defence against homosexual love. He says one loves a parent of the same sex, but denies it to oneself, changes the love to hatred, and then, in order to justify the hatred, changes 'I hate him', as it were, to 'He hates me'; one transforms homosexual love into feelings of persecution. Schreber felt God persecuted him. Freud said Schreber had transformed an unconscious conflict about loving his father into feelings that God was persecuting him.

Schreber's father had been one of the leading, perhaps the leading, pedagogue in Germany in the nineteenth century. He wrote eighteen books and booklets; many are about his methods of rearing children. His books were translated into several languages. One of his books went through over forty editions, so you can get some idea of how much influence he had. Freud and all the people who wrote about Schreber after Freud, for the next fifty years, ignored altogether the father's writings. The father says explicitly that he had applied his ideas to his own children. I've read some of his father's writings. They are fascinating, especially because of the remarkable correspondences between some of the techniques he had for raising children and some of the strange experiences his son had, for which the son was regarded as

paranoid. For instance, the father invented a device called a *Geradehalter*, which was an iron bar that was fastened to the chests of children when they sat; its purpose was to keep their posture straight; it had an iron bar that passed between their legs to keep them from crossing them, which the father said was 'morally advantageous'. The son experienced, years later, what he called 'miracles' at the hands of God. One of them was 'the compression-of-the-chest miracle' - which he thought was something pressing on his chest from the outside. The father also tied a belt across the beds, across the chests, of sleeping children to keep them from rolling over at night, imagining it would be dangerous if they slept on one side. The father invented a machine called the *Kopfhalter*, which was a strap attached to the hair at one end and to the child's underwear at the other, so that if he moved his head to one side or the other or did not keep it straight, it pulled the hair. The father thought it produced a certain 'stiffening' effect. His son describes the 'head-compression miracle', which consisted of pulling and tearing headaches, which caused him great suffering and which seemed to get worse whenever he heard a sound which induced him to look to one side or the other. The son describes 'God's writing-down-system'. He thought all his thoughts and activities were written down and were used to persecute him. His father had used a 'punishment board', which he had kept in the children's room on which adults wrote down all the 'sins' of the children. Every month, the father would hold a family meeting in which to review these 'sins' of the children. There are many, many, uncanny correspondences between the son's experiences while thought mad and the father's methods of child-rearing. People who wrote about Schreber ignored the father's writings despite the fact that Schreber has been probably the most written about schizophrenic in the world.

This brings other issues into view. I have tried to understand how men like Schreber's father became so popular, had such great influence. His ideas were popular with the parents of Hitler's generation. Dr. Schreber thought children

must be brought up to believe in a dictatorship in the household, where the father was absolute ruler. Women had no say at all. Children were ruled by a look of the eye. He recommended techniques, starting at three months old, aimed to foster absolute obedience in children to their fathers and absolute repression of their own desires. This links the character of Nazi Germany with previous German child-rearing practices.

*Most of this repression seems to have a sexual basis.*

My findings fit well with Wilhelm Reich's views about character and body armour. Without apparently knowing of Schreber's father, Reich certainly gets the point that the Prussian soldiers seem to have been brought up from infancy to be stiff and rigid, both physically and in their character, and to be obedient to the father. Dr. Schreber, the father, believed in the suppression of all sexual outlets. He proposed various rituals and physical exercises to prevent masturbation and to deal with people who had wet dreams. They had to do exercises every morning. This fits particularly well with Reich's theory that fascism came into being as a result of the suppression of spontaneous sexual impulses in infants, children, adolescents and adults.

I don't know if all paranoid people were persecuted as children. My book considers this possibility. Perhaps people who think they are persecuted and imagine strange sorts of persecutors really were persecuted as children, maybe in ways similar to their feelings of persecution as adults. There are also many people who were and are persecuted, and don't know they are, although we have no word for them. We have a word only for people who feel persecuted but whom other people think are not persecuted; we have no word in psychiatric usage or English for people who are persecuted but don't know it, although it is a prevalent condition.

*Could you say something about the forms of persecution and control exercised by parents on their children?*

We have at the moment mainly anecdotal evidence. I have my store of anecdotes to shock anyone, as do many of my colleagues. For instance the other day, a man told me how, when he was an infant, whenever he peed on the floor, his mother would pour salt and pepper on the urine and force his face down into the urine puddle. That kind of story is shocking but I hear two or three of those every week. We know nowadays about the 'battered-baby' syndrome, the 'neglected-child' syndrome, the 'child-maltreatment' syndrome, which have come to public notice only in the last twenty years. It makes one wonder why it has taken so long for people to be able to consider the possibility of such events. They have been going on, I'm sure, for as long as people have been alive. Something in our culture just now is allowing us to observe, notice, and discuss such facts and to begin to wonder why they occur. The Greeks who left their children on hillsides to die were kinder to their children than many parents are today.

*Does insanity always occur in the context of the family?*

Most people, most of the time, I think, are unconscious of what might be called their programming. The rules that govern our minds have been largely hard-programmed into us at early ages. Most of the time we are perfectly unconscious that we have been hard-programmed; we are unaware of the programming, and, if there are any rules that forbid our awareness of that programming, we are unaware of them too.

I don't think it requires any more consciousness to behave in ways that are regarded as rational than in ways that are regarded as irrational. Whereas most people's behaviour all the time is automatic, it's only when experience or behaviour becomes problematic that we start enquiring as to how it came about. People who are regarded as ill are those in whom the gears, as it were, aren't working smoothly for some reason: perhaps one set of programmes clashes with another set or the programming within them comes in conflict with the

programming, say, of the police.

Most people have been programmed in and by their families of origin and in and by all the persons forming the larger network outside the family. The case of Schreber raises questions about the social context. The behaviour of Dr. Schreber, the father, must have been part of a very large network, not just that of his family. We must ask not only what goes on in the families of people who come to be thought crazy, but what is the context in which the family's behaviour is going on.

*How do you get at the childhood experiences?*

One way to find out what went on in somebody's family is to see what goes on in the family now. I assume that there is some correspondence between patterns of relations between people in the present and those of twenty and thirty years before. We study the family of origin of so-called patients to see how they 'play' together, which gives some clue as to how they may have played together twenty or thirty years before. Getting the history from people is one means, but some people don't or can't remember, especially if there are rules against remembering the relevant information.

One excellent method of getting information about a family would be to live with them until they got over being on their 'best' behaviour. Jules Henry, an American anthropologist, did live with some families of schizophrenic children. He was shocked, dazed, confused by what he saw. He somehow managed to come out of it well enough to be able to write about it coherently and discuss it interestingly. But he found it a strange experience indeed. For instance, he told me the story of how a seven year old child said to her mother, 'Mummy, I have a sore throat'. Her mother said, 'No, you don't'. The girl said, 'Mummy, I have a pain in my throat'. 'Oh get off with you', said the mother. 'No, you don't, no, you don't'. Finally she said, 'Mummy, there is a green cherry in my stomach'. Her mother said, 'All right, we'll call the doctor'.

*The classic text book definition of schizophrenia is as a withdrawal or retreat from reality. But there is today an intensely unreal, disembodied, dream-like texture to modern life. Do you find this?*

I find that my experiences at the heart of certain middle-class English or American families are stranger to me than life in villages in India where I've spent some time. As to the dimensions of the irrationality - I don't know, it's beyond the range of one individual's vision. One gets a glimpse of it when one walks into a large school or factory and just watches what is going on. I am always horrified that people can manage to spend a large part of their lives that way. What is more remarkable is that they can without seeming to be bothered by it. In order to find out how they were brought to the point that they can endure life under certain conditions that I regard as intolerable and not seem bothered by it, one has to go way back, not only into individual history but into social history, macro-history. Since Marx, people in what are called the social sciences have been discussing the 'alienation' of modern western man. There has been much attention paid to the macro-institutions, mainly the socio-economic institutions that people have felt occasioned this state of development.

Now we have had macro-political revolutions in many countries, and many people have observed that conditions post-revolution seemed remarkably similar to conditions pre-revolution, in terms of macro-political structures. Recently, people have begun to consider that perhaps the reason why this has happened is that there has been no revolution in small-group personal relations, particularly the family. The well-known revolutionaries of the last two hundred years spent much time and energy between the ages of twenty and forty trying to figure out what was the matter with society at large and how to seize power. When they succeeded, once in power, they often adopted patterns of relationship and behaviour similar to the ones they had been fighting to overthrow. This seems true to some extent in cases of all revolutions, some more so than others. I think a major reason for this has been

that political revolutionaries, with a few exceptions, have not taken time to step back from the lives of their families of origin and criticize them. There was talk at the time of the Russian revolution about changing the family structure and the rules governing the sexual relations of adolescents and young adults, but no one took this seriously enough to guarantee a widespread and lasting revolution in this area. Soon this kind of talk was forgotten. Family life in Russia is probably similar to that in pre-revolution times.

*Could you conceive of a revolution that did not do away with the family?*

The basic unit, as many people have pointed out, is the mother and the child. There are possibly a large number of methods by which that unit can find economic and emotional support; the modern nuclear family is only one of them. The family as it now exists in the West is probably of recent origin; in most times and places in history societies did not lay so much responsibility for raising children upon two individuals alone, as is the case today. The various communes that have sprung up around the West, often not in contact with each other to start with, but simply arising from a feeling that some new form of social life is needed, are attempts to find alternatives to the nuclear family. A competition is now going on between paradigms, between the nuclear family and other forms of social life that haven't yet become established. We'll know more in twenty to thirty years which of the competing paradigms is going to prevail.

*Would you describe your Arbour's Housing Association as a form of commune?*

It is. We make available to individuals in distress a large number of adults who are themselves on-going concerns - many more, say, than the two people in families who are available to an individual.

*To return to the subject of paranoia, Wilhelm Reich in his book Character Analysis describes an interesting case of a*

*paranoid woman who was also frigid. Reich explained her paranoia as a deformed expression or outflow of the life force that had been damned up inside her.*

In that chapter he describes an anecdote about a woman who was frigid and to whom he applied orgone therapy. She began to loosen up sexually, to get more energy, and her husband began to feel electricity going through his body, which terrified him. He was diagnosed as paranoid and went into a mental hospital, which illustrates how repression is a defence which serves the interests of more people than just the individual who seems repressed. In this case her repression of her sexuality had been protecting him.

Reich in another book suggests that we might have a discussion in Parliament on issues of puberty. Not a bad idea. Recently, at the Little Red School Book Trial in England *The Guardian* reported the testimony of a doctor who said that masturbation was a bad thing and had a harmful effect because it was a secret thing and tended to increase the generation gap between parents and children.

*D.H. Lawrence also used to be against masturbation because it was done in private, the 'dirty little secret' as he called it. In fact, isn't that one of the old supposed symptoms of madness, people who masturbate in public?*

Oh, yes. Not only masturbating in public. The history of the ideas of medicine and psychiatry towards masturbation makes remarkable reading. Many reputable doctors, a hundred and fifty years ago, thought masturbation not only caused insanity, but also blindness, premature death, wasting of the body, TB, cancer, functional disorders of the heart, urinary difficulties, as well as many sexual disturbances, such as infertility, impotence and so on. The techniques deployed against it included circumcision, both in boys and girls - there is some evidence that castration was also practised. There was a technique called infibulation, which meant passing a wire through the prepuce of the boy's penis; there were devices to fit around the penises of boys while they slept, dog-toothed metal clips - if the boy had an erection during the night, it seized his penis. In that social context Freud developed his concept of universal castration anxiety.

As recently as the 1940's, pediatric textbooks were still giving guide-lines to parents on how to prevent their children masturbating. Other techniques included tying the legs apart from each other to the sides of the bed, tying boys and girls in splints, hands were put in bags and tied to the sides of the bed, whole bodies were put in bags and the hands outside. This was part of the training that 'well-brought-up' children underwent.

*c Andrew Rossabi  
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*to be continued*

The emotional significance of muscle tension is not adequately understood. The unresolved emotional conflicts of childhood are structured in the body by chronic muscular tensions that enslave the individual by limiting his mobility and capacity for feeling. These tensions which grip the body - mould it, split it and distort it - must be eliminated before one can achieve inner freedom. Without this inner freedom it is illusory to believe that one can think, feel, act, and love freely.

*The Betrayal of the Body* Alexander Lowen (Collier 1967)