

CAN THE PSYCHOTIC SUBJECT AFFORD A LOVE RELATIONSHIP?

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Love relationships have always been a hard experience, full of contradiction for every human being. In one way, love can be experienced as an opening to the world's beauty, focused on one single loved object, otherwise, as a search for a home, a safe place to inhabit and to finally find rest. Or, instead, love can be felt as an improvement of our own human resource potential, through the encounter with another person, by allowing them to flourish and reproduce (Reale 1997). On the other hand, however, to be in love can be felt as a dangerous submission to a greater power, which is conferred to the other person. Whoever says 'I love you' in a certain sense is putting in the hands of another person his own happiness and desire to develop and grow in the world. But who knows if this person can meet the hypothesised expectations? (Correale 2010). From this second perspective, love is felt as a danger, because it is threatened by the fickleness of the beloved object and by the frightening risk of bearing a loss or a passive regression, a submission, an acceptance of another person's dominance over ourselves. The balance between these two positions, on one hand the elated discovery of somebody or something that empowers us and improves our potentiality toward the world and, on the other hand, the spectre of the power of the other, that instead of enriching us can empty and subjugate us, is always unstable and vulnerable.

A further risk in loving relationships consists of an uncontrolled desire that can possibly arise to nullify ourselves in the partner, to get rid, as it were, ourselves in an undifferentiated unit with the other. This desire can be accompanied by both a powerful charm and a terror without name (Ferenczi 1932).

These few hints described but do not adequately delineate the field we are addressing. Still, I chose to outline this background to introduce the main topic that this paper will deal with.

We could summarise the theme in this way: how can a psychotic person, or better a subject with strong psychotic traits, live his love relationships? Are these experiences for him or her a salvation or a terror? In what way can the very intense desire of living a loving experience cohabit with the anxiety of losing oneself in this experience, like in the sea? (Green 1983). What has been said about love, in some way, is true for every relationship in which the other assumes for us a primary character and an absolutely irreplaceable position. In every situation in which the loss of a relationship leaves an empty void because of a loss of the uniqueness that only the other possesses in a particular, intense and dominant quantity (Green 1990). Therefore, to treat this theme it is necessary to further investigate what we mean by psychosis and to define it in a more accurate way, to see if some related constant configurations of this psychopathological framework exist.

Indeed, frequently, one who approaches the psychosis construct is struck and disoriented by the vastness of this phenomena and, at first sight, this can leave the impression of an irreducible, unitary structure. Moreover, the classical psychiatric triad – depersonalisation, hallucinations, and delusion – although very useful on a clinical level, is in no way exhaustive to cover an extremely wide range of experiences and situations (Bleuler 1911). Therefore, we will proceed in this way.

First, we will deal with the psychosis issue, attempting, as I said, to point out some basic structures and constant configurations. By doing so, we will consider the interconnection between the phenomenological description and the psychoanalytical approach. Subsequently, we will discuss the theme of how these basic structures resonate in love relationship experiences and with all the relationships characterised by intimacy and involvement. Then, we will see how the psychotic subject tends to search for strong static bonds rather than a loving relationship, as if asking the other to build a container that could hold his or her fragmented experiences, instead of being a propelling force for his or her personal development. Finally, we will approach the very hard, but essential theme of how it is possible, as it were, to accompany the psychotic patient toward love relationships, which may be able to reconcile both the danger of disorientation and the deep aspiration for stability. What has been indicated above suggests that the psychotic lives with a true terror of each potential love relationship, of which, however, he has a tremendous longing. Helping him to achieve a love relationship that is not blazed with idealisation and neither is merely a safe spot, is the real challenge of every clinician that deals with psychotic patients. Now, let us face the theme of psychosis.

Psychosis

I suggest we consider the psychotic organisation built mainly on three vast cores that we can define as the body, the sensory and the intrusiveness of the other on the subject.

Let us consider them one by one, taking into account, however, that these three elements are strictly interlinked, and from this interlacement comes the underlying experience of the condition of the psychotic person, which we might summarise in the touching description made by Ronald Laing, who coined the term ‘ontological insecurity’ (Laing 2010). I would like to propose the idea that the ontological insecurity is an inevitable consequence, derived from the action of these three intertwined cores. Let us deal with the first issue: the body.

Every psychotic has to deal with the common experience of lifelong anxiety, which we might define as, in a broad sense, hypochondriacal (Freud 1914; Lombardi 2016). To clarify this term, I would like to point out the fact that the psychotic’s body perception is always in some way damaged, confused, unstructured, perhaps soft, and probably too harsh. The psychotic experiences his body not as something vital, but as something mechanical or lifeless (Resnik 1972). This perception sometimes might be explicit and it may express itself through assertions like: ‘I feel like a stiff’, ‘I feel I am made of wax’, ‘My content is all liquid’, ‘The pieces of my body go in different directions’, ‘I am not a whole thing’, and other similar expressions (Rosenfeld 1999). In other cases, this same feeling can take the form of a spasmodic attention to all the corporal functions, always felt as on the brink of rupture, damage or abrupt discontinuation.

Another possibility, and these are the most subtle cases, is that the aspect we defined as hypochondriacal is not registered as such, but interferes, so to speak, from below, with all the relational experiences of the psychotic subject. The subject seems to carry the burden of a weight, which he or she is unable to define, but that, close observation reveals, comes from these types of body perception. It is felt as something that has never found its pervasive breath of life, but instead has remained as a set of ‘without life’ pieces. It is certainly possible to interpret what we have said thus far in reference to the theme of castration. In this case, we mean castration not in a neurotic sense of the impossibility to stay in one’s own body and satisfy one’s own desire, but in a more dramatic sense of being convinced of having a damaged body, calibrated from the beginning on a lack of something, which the psychotic subject experiences as irreparable (Lacan 2010).

This attention to the body must be constantly kept in mind. Moreover, many hidden or apparently offset psychoses are such because the subject has resorted to compensate for his hypochondriacal anxieties, which results in an obsessive way of behaving. By obsessive way of behaving, I mean the tendency to bring the patient's entire life under a very strict order. This takes the shape of a behaviour that never changes, of inalterable habits, of protective renunciations to any self-desires that risk to alter the customary rules. In short, a life in which pleasure is restricted to a few standardised and often self-referential activities, whereby the body's functions are always conducted with harsh control: food, movement, sleep, sensorial stimulations, sexuality, everything is done in a firm and excessively controlled way (Tellenbach 1961). Liberty is given only to a few acts and they are permitted because they are considered non-hazardous. In this perspective, you might say that the psychotic subject is desperately looking for a life type in which his body is not questioned, but accepted by himself and the entire world with these limitations that are and always will be present, but never completely communicable. If this were to happen, the sentence would be a deep feeling of shame and, in some cases, guilt. In fact, the psychotic subject experiences the hypochondriac feeling as his profound singularity, which makes him envy the other's body which is not subject, as his, to this anxiety. This conviction makes him feel unacceptable to his parents' and society's expectations. The hypochondria, therefore, becomes a source of ridicule, as if the psychotic feels he is always naked and exposed to the gaze of everybody. Additionally, it is experienced as a source of a strong guilt: 'With my birth, I made my parents and the people I have met since unhappy because I am not like them' (Aulagnier 1975).

The second point underlined is the sensoriality, which I consider the central theme, as the crucial organiser of all the issues we are discussing. For sensoriality, or rather for sensorial accentuation, I mean a specific modality, in which the psychotic subject tends to live his object relations, both animated and inanimate. On other occasions, I defined this modality as hallucinatory (Correale 2016). In psychiatry, hallucination means a sensorial perception which does not correspond to a real object, but is placed outside of the subject itself. By hallucinatory, I mean a real object perception that is 'really' outside, but in this place this object takes some features that make it, so to speak, hyper-bright, hyper-intense and hyper-concrete. It is as if some characteristics of an object – the wrinkle in the eyelid, the colour of a dress, the brightness of a smile, a particular tone of voice, a face's furrow, the white of a wall, the cat's whiskers and so on – take a separate appeal, which detaches them from the global background

of the objects to which they belong and makes them in certain way independent. This hallucinatory modality derives from the following properties.

The object is no longer seen by the usual modality figure-ground, which is one important way in which the subject organises perception. Here, the figure and the ground detach and the figure becomes autonomous and floats, in a certain way, on a background that no longer contains it.

Furthermore, the hallucinatory detail is not illuminated by a specific light source. Hence, it is situated in a place in which the light arrives with certain characteristics. Specifically, the object is illuminated by a kind of diffused light, a sort of meridian light that does not create shade. There is only an object permanence, the object's particular permanence, in a static condition and mobility.

At last, the object, or better yet the object's particular, is not identified from a certain point of view that would put it in a determined point in the space-time continuum, but it seems to be seen by a neutral gaze, as if a detached entity is observing it from a very close or very far perception, but, regardless, one that does not belong to the usual space-time coordinates (Correale 2014).

This sensorial accentuation has an important consequence. The hallucinatory object is removed from the human context, and acquires qualities that we might define as magical or supernatural or transcendent or sacred. We are going to discuss these distinctions later on. For the moment we could say that this hallucinatory modality places the object, or better yet, the object's particular, in both another space and another time. This time is dominated by other rules, which are between the human and the divine, and are not shared by other subjects. We might say that the hallucinatory, using a metaphor, rains from the sky, or goes to the sky, because it is disconnected from the usual connective plots that make perception refer to something. This perception combines the new with the old, the novelty with memory, the present with the past and the future. If we try to imagine the wonderment, the curiosity, but also the terror that this condition may cause, we can understand why a psychotic subject lives in a continuous sense of depersonalisation. By depersonalisation, we intend a very intense feeling of extraneousness to other things. The world is at the same time familiar and obscure and is considered an intrusion of something unexpected on the object and irreducible both to the habits and the usual. As Freud said in 'The Uncanny', mystery and strangeness break into

the familiar (Freud 1919). That is why the psychotic never feels, so to speak, at home. Rather, he lives in a world ruled by disorientation. In his experience, the world is never completely familiar, because it is always threatened by the appearance of sensorial experiences that are not objects anymore, but instead, slightly mocking, seductive or menacing spirits that give life to his own world that, in this way, becomes a tiny house infested by ghosts.

I like to say that, instead of being homeless, the psychotic lives in an infested house, which is no longer his own and no longer has limits and borders. This framework, that I have so far only described, is subject to an explanation, which I would like to propose after having exhausted the third point, concerning the other's intrusiveness. By the other's intrusiveness, I mean an experience that a lot of psychotics report about the fact that contact with the other is usually felt as a fatigue, a job, a commitment, a risk. But why is it felt in this way? Many psychotic people say that contact with the other activates feelings of an unbearable comparison. The other is solid, the other has a working body, the other has a stable world vision, while I constantly feel rickety, broken, or even inconsistent, fading, and nullified. Certainly, this central experience might explain this specific point. But the other's intrusiveness goes even further. Often, the psychotic subject experiences the sensorial hallucinatory perception, which comes from the other, as if they were piercing arrows. This occupies him and requires a huge strain to maintain control and attention: he indeed feels invaded.

My patient told me: 'Your words are like waves, in which I feel submerged, so I am trying not to hear them and instead to think of something else'. Another one said: 'You told me we will see each other tomorrow, but I felt the "w" of tomorrow like a needle penetrating in my skin and it paralyzes me'. These examples are just a few of several. Another patient told me: 'When I walk in this room, you seem like a giant, who can fall on me and squash me or the Eiffel Tower, which, collapsing on the ground, sticks the metal pieces in my body'. On this level, we are all aware of the trouble which many psychotics deal with in a face-to-face setting with a single person in the consultation room. Many psychotics cannot bear to lie down on a psychoanalytic couch, because they experience this as a dangerous defenselessness, a naked exposure without any protection to the other's look and words, and they have the need to maintain control, with a very strict sight, the other's every move (Rossi Monti and Stanghellini 2009). Furthermore, as previously stated, the therapist is felt as a protection, a shield, an embankment compared to the penetration of the relational experiences. That is exactly the contradictory experience which rips the psychotic subject. I am invoking you as a shield, but

you as a shield might transform into a spear, an arrow, a sword. The outcome of this contradiction could be, for example, the interruption of a session, a call for a shorter session, or to fill it with uninteresting details, as if the message was: ‘Please stay there, don’t move yourself, I need you, but I need you to stay stationary’.

Looking back over these three points, the body, the sensoriality and intrusiveness, we might intuitively understand a connection between them. But, at this point in the discussion, it is necessary to propose a possible hypothesis that makes this connection more coherent and visible. I believe it is possible that this linking can be found in the other’s relational modality, where the key element consists of an intolerance of separation and an intolerance of every situation that might be felt as an absence, a detachment or a loss. The real or alleged loss of the other is immediately occupied, not by a memory recall of the other’s good features, which we could introject, but rather, so to speak, by the other’s pieces, by the other’s sensorial fragments, that instead of filling the void, fragment the subject and fill him or her with a full of terror (Botella, Botella 2003). It is as if the psychotic is saying: ‘When you are absent or when I fear you may be absent, or when I am not very sure about you, pieces of you come to my mind and fill the non-presence with another kind of presence, violently sensorial and persecutory, that fill the void with a too-full visionarity’. But it is time to deal with this topic more thoroughly.

A possible summary

Now that we have briefly identified the three points that characterise the psychotic framework, which tends to have a stable configuration, it is necessary to identify a common thread, a trail, that links these three points and which constitutes the supplementary core that integrates them together. I would like to say immediately that this thread is to be found, in my opinion, in the second point, so in the hyper-sensorial, which we may define as the hallucinatory dimension of perception, intended in the previously stated connotation (Northoff 2014). The hallucinatory dimension does not express itself only in relation to the external world. In fact, it manifests itself, in a more devious way, in the sensorial data perception that comes from the inside body, which is no less pervasive and intense (Lombardi 2016). A physical pain, a sense of tiredness or weakness, or a feeling of excitement, a visceral spasm or muscle cramps: all these internal perceptions receive an ‘almost visionary’ trait. They are not any longer kinesthetic or proprioceptive data, nor are they body signals that are sent to inform the subject on his actual global body functioning. They are, so to speak, body apparitions that appear to the subject in a way that is decontextualised from the rest of the global corporal functioning.

It is as if they were body parts which activate themselves separately on their own and take the characteristic of something that comes from the sky and lies in the body, but that regardless still remains a foreign matter inside the subject's body. The outcome of this corporeal 'visionarity' is that the global body state is felt both stranger, fragmented, mechanic and damaged or at least not inhabited by his own live forces (Rosenfeld 1965). From this point comes the descriptions of empty, liquid, sandy, woody bodies or clogged or haemorrhagic bodies: all these descriptions are not body fantasies, but visions inside the body, certainties of a body conquered by uncontrollable and powerful forces.

The hyper-sensorial hallucination branches out, descends, on one side, in the kinesthetic and proprioceptive experience, on the other side, in the sensorial experience of the outside world.

From this point of view, you may understand why the psychotic is subjected to anxieties of being inconsistent. His fragmented being is felt as something extraneous, whereby the global affect can certainly be defined as that ontological insecurity which Ronald Laing spoke of in his most famous work (Laing 2001). In addition to ontological insecurity, I would like to add the disintegration anxiety of a body disunity, that causes the psychotic subject to protect himself in a very controlled and avoidant life, often with an obsessive type of defensive and ordering behaviour, in order to prevent the much-feared fragmentation (Bion 1966). The delusion seems from this framework, as we said, to be a second-degree organiser, a resort to a bizarre, but plausible, explanation, albeit using magical and sometimes supernatural codes. Once the delusion is involved, the psychotic subject may re-establish his own self-confidence, because the explanation he found does not belong to the ordinary world, but to a world governed by 'other' rules, parallel to the customary world (Rossi Monti 2008). In fact, an effect of decontextualising the hallucinatory figure is the assurance that this figure comes from another world and is almost the offshoot of the universal that creeps in the particular. This universal might be identified as a deity, as a powerful force or as the effect of extremely influential instruments and machineries (Tausk 1919). But somehow, when the delusion takes over, the psychotic subject can overcome the anxiety and feel invested with a special retribution. He or she believes to be chosen by God or by the devil, but anyway predestined to something exceptional. Additionally, in the paranoid vision, where the divine and the supernatural are less involved, there is still a limitless idealisation of the hallucinatory experience. One is placed in an exceptional and powerful world, from which the paranoid subject can try to hide or by which he may feel squashed.

At this point in the discussion, it is time to search for a genetic matrix for this sequence of descriptions: where does this come from, what are the life conditions, the lived experiences, that may give birth, or at least activate, the hallucinatory dimension and from it may trigger all the phenomena chains which we have described? I would like to mention the issue of the psychotic vulnerability, in order to rapidly move on to a second point (De Masi 2006). The psychotic vulnerability, in the perspective that we have followed, is the tendency, certainly biologically predetermined, to convert perceptual information into visionary and hallucinatory information. It is very likely, and surely the neurosciences will have much to say on this issue, that the decontextualisation, which is the other side of the visionarity, is associated to a disconnection between parts and functions, that in the nonpsychotic subject are interlinked in different ways (Northoff 2014; Kapur 2003). But the most important problem, on a clinical level, is always the same: what activates this vulnerability in the psychotic subject or in the future psychotic subject, this hyper-sensorial and visionary potential either in the body or in the external world? What are the life experiences, conditions, the environmental data, both the early-growing and late-growing relationships that may induce an activation of this pathological potential? I would like to propose the idea that the future psychotic subject responds with hallucinatory modality whenever the caregiver, usually the mother but more generally the oedipal couple, achieves a sort of an enigmatic and contradictory character. By enigmatic, I mean an object feature which does not fall in the representation of that object we had so far. A sentence, a gesture, an anger, a sign of presence, an undue sexualisation: children experience these areas that we have defined enigmatic, as a fracture, a collapse, an opening abyss, a mysterious and unforeseen loneliness, an abandonment. We can certainly talk of disorientation, an anxiety to stay in a place which is limitless, without any boundaries, where the space-time coordinates are suspended and there is not any possible connection to a soothing object, if not to the same enigmatic object, which has set in a vacuum the disorientation itself (Borgna 1995). This is where a reference to the Freudian Uncanny helps us, when about the penetration of the extraneousness into the familiar is discussed, or the unrecognisability of something which before was well known (Freud 1919). A different way to talk about the enigmaticity is dealing with the distance theme: we might say that the object, the other, becomes enigmatic when it is too far ahead or too close. The excess of both closeness and farness are felt as guilt-induced demands that the object makes on the subject. In other words, as an investment of expectations and pretensions. This manifests in menaces in the 'too far' case, or by too much pressure in the 'too close' case (Aulagnier 1975). 'Be like me', 'Be as I want you'. The touching and very human fantasy to perpetuate himself in his children is felt by the psychotic subject as an intolerant obligation to satisfy and fill in the mourning and

the shortcomings of the mother and the parents. But again: what ties the disorientation to the hallucinatory visionarity?

I would like to propose the idea that the hallucinatory visionarity is involved whenever the disorientation is triggered. It functions like this: the psychotic subject feels obligated, in order to survive, to summon up a hallucinatory perception that fills in the space left empty and reduces, therefore, the unbearable sense of loneliness. We might say that the figure which is felt as enigmatic generates a feeling of emptiness that characterises the disorientation, and this feeling is filled with the hallucinatory visionarity. It could be said that absence produces visions. These visions do not fill this empty space, but instead create an alternative, immense and sometimes unearthly space, which crashes the psychotic subject without reassuring him. Using a simple metaphor, we might say that instead of the other human, the vision creates a deifying human, or hyper-powerful, who might appease the disorientation anxiety, which in turn is felt in the body as a damaged or hypochondriacal body. Psychoanalysis has described this process with the name of repudiation (*Verwerfung*): this repudiation is said to be a mechanism which precedes the appearance of an over powerful information perception, which is put in another space, one that is outside both the linguistic plot and the family bond (Freud 1914-1918; Lacan 2010). Also, the *forclusion* takes up this theme. Perception is placed outside the language and therefore assumes a strange and decontextualised character, which Lacan indicated as the real: what is there without a possible linguistic assimilation (Lacan 2010). We might say that the hallucinatory perception pierces language and crushes the psychotic subject in an anxiety regarding a hyper-presence, which is powerful but not definable. This is an open issue: are repudiation and *forclusion* ways to eject, to remove from oneself the perception, or, on the contrary, attempts to resume in oneself something lost, albeit using unusual modalities? (Bion 2009). From the proposed perspective, I would be more inclined to the second hypothesis. The hallucinatory perception does not want to eject, but to resume something. It wants to recover a lost relationship with the object, but the hyper-sensory makes this operation modified and deeply altered. The psychotic subject, according to his history and past fantasy, chooses some sensorial information from the object. The pieces of information he chooses are the most enigmatic and he amplifies them in an attempt to control them: we might say that he does not reject them, but he places them in a different ground, a no-man's-land, in which they belong neither to himself nor to others.

Disorientation and visionarity

The central nucleus of the psychotic issue cannot be separated from the close link between disorientation and visionarity. The psychotic subject can be characterised, in this perspective, by a powerful tendency to live every experience of break, separation, doubt, and danger from the other as a fall into a condition of disorientation, bewilderment and foreignness. In turn, this condition would be, so to speak, filled with hyper-perceptive aspects, hyper-sensorial particulars that come from the other, the world and its own body. These are felt as concrete things, unconnected to the object and, therefore, instead of being linked with the object from which they came, coming from the universe, by which is meant as an immense and unlimited totality. Therefore, the delusion would be considered an attempt to give order to this obscure relation between disorientation and hyper-sensorial visionarity, for example inserting everything in a divine message, or in a very powerful sorcery or in a long-range conspiracy, plotted by mysterious figures. It is very important to consider that the disorientation is characterised by two basic elements: bewilderment and extraneous mysteriousness. Bewilderment is similar to the condition of an astronaut, fallen from the spaceship: a limitless immensity, with no frame of reference and without cardinal directions (Bion 1977). The extraneous mysteriousness is given by the rapidity, a condition in which objects assume a hyper-real character, which makes them unreal, excessive, equipped, as it were, with an excess of being. Everything becomes too powerful, extreme, endowed by an excess of meaning. In this sense, we might say that the psychotic subject is an expert of real. In other words, an expert of something that, because of the *forclusion*, has become too much thing and not enough word. But this real is the sign of something, refers to something outside of the self, to a parallel world made of faceless emissaries, which, as they please, may send encrypted messages, of which the psychotic subject must face the weight. Additionally, objects keep this mysterious character in chronic psychosis in the long-time intervals of suspension between the acute and delusional phases. It is no longer the mysteriousness shouted in the acute phase, but a mysteriousness slightly confused, a dubiousness, a mild concern, that Blankenburg (1998) used to call the loss of natural self-evidence. On the other hand, people who study family dynamics have always underlined that in the relationship between psychotics and parental characters, a certain enigmatic part is always present, incorporated in a relationship often endowed with an excess of blurring boundaries (Nicolò 2002). We might again recall the idea that the psychotic space is immense, but this vastness has a brief duration, because it is immediately saturated by the hyper-sensorial visionarity and, in turn, the hyper-sensorial visionarity is saturated by delusion or, in case of chronicity, by a certain contemplative inertia,

which is an attempt to coexist with objects, leaving them in a certain state of mystery, but depriving them of the terrifying mystery of the acute phase.

A timeless love

After this quick attempt to summarise, we are now, probably, in a more useful position to deal with the theme of the love relationship. How do love relationships fit in with a background like the one we have so far described? In any case, we are now in a position which allows us to more specifically address the topic of the psychotic capacity to engage in a love relationship. I think we might say that, if disorientation, with its weight of visionarity, is always waiting in the shadow, the only way the psychotic subject has to deal with this problem is to aspire to an infinite loving relationship. One without possible changes and that has a tone of strong immutability; consequently, his or her only way to avoid disorientation and connected anxieties, is to establish a relationship that belongs more to the sphere of the eternal than to that of time. The perception of time necessarily implies the idea of movement, starting from a point and going to another one, or any way to revolve around something and, therefore, to accept some positional changes. Even in the depressive position, so powerfully highlighted by Melanie Klein, there is the idea that to accept ambivalence means to accept a drive, a rhythm, a fluctuating movement between love and anger, good and evil, sweetness and violence (Klein 1946).

The same is true in mourning a loss. Basically, it means letting go, recognising that the object is lost and that we might retrieve it only in our memory or in perpetuating its example (Freud 1917). We know that melancholy is the inability to cope with mourning. It is a desperate attempt to hold the object back, to identify with an object that, only for the fact that it is no longer here, becomes evil and also, by associating with us, is making us 'evil' too (Freud 1917). Therefore, the psychotic subject does not tolerate loss: separating from the object is felt like an invisible catastrophe, a chilling void. Only the eternal brings consolation and relief. By timeless eternal we mean something which is stationary and condensed in a firm and static point. The universe before the big bang could be the metaphor that illustrates this point: when the expansion begins, the pain and the anxiety begins too. All the psychic work of the psychotic subject is in the end an attempt to get back to the starting point, which must hold in itself the maximum power and the minimum action. Still, it must be taken into consideration that this powerful aspiration for something eternal does not exhaust the subject's psychic life. Next to it, a strong aspiration for the world itself is present, a strong desire to have a 'normal' life, an aspiration to break free from the deity. He or she does this to avoid the feeling that the other is

provided with a power that the psychotic subject does not have and that he or she would like to gain. He or she attempts to make this gain by seduction, some impulsive acting-out, sex, or by inventing totalising loves, which are all generally bound to create profound disappointment. From all this comes the spasmodic desire of the psychotic subject for love relationships characterised by a sense of eternal. This eternal can assume more accessible shapes through possessiveness, addiction, jealousy and extreme kinds of attachment, intolerance to detachments and separations, actual or presumed, of the loved person. This kind of attachment, based on the eternal aspiration, finds its base in an extremely powerful maternal relation (Cimino 2015). That the mother remains the prototype of every relationship that follows can be explained by a double-sided issue. On one side, I can detach myself from my mother only if I find another figure which completely replaces her. On the other side, I could never really separate from my mother, because I would experience that disorientation, which we have been discussing. That is why it is so difficult for the psychotic subject to engage in love relationships. Deep down, in love, as in friendship, there is always a certain risk, a possible gap between expectations and the real answer.

It functions like this: the psychotic subject would be happy only in a complete reassurance, an absolute guarantee, because the subsequent disappointment, loss and void are for her or him the anteroom of desolation, which in turn opens to the cascade of events that we previously described.

It is quite clear that in every love affair there is an aspiration for something that lasts forever, and the idea of defeating time is probably one of the greatest forces that leads people to love. The difference is that in non-psychotic subjects, at least potentially, loss causes pain but not an apocalyptic catastrophe, while in the psychotic subject this same loss leads to disorientation and to the inevitable consequence of the hyper-sensorial visionarity. This may help us to understand why so often psychotic subjects are happy to remain in an establishment, primarily the family, secondly in communities. These establishments provide a structure or static place in which to work or make activity (Correale 2012). Inside a structure, many psychotic subjects even carry out activities of a high level. They can create artistic, scientific, or thought productions, or they may build strong and longstanding bonds. But they can only do this if, somewhere or somehow, there is something which is eternal. As if the structure, most of the time familiar, might be a place to which it is always possible to get back, an anti-disorientation place.

We can see, therefore, that for the psychotic subject, love has two potentially antagonistic faces.

The first one is eternal. The object is there stably and it guarantees security and often the price paid is a substantial invariability. Certain mother-son relations are of this kind: everyday life is filled with habits of repetitive nature. The mother loses her personal characteristics and becomes a pillow to sleep on, a perfume, a warm and immobile presence (Bleger 2010). These relationship patterns are well known in psychiatry and often the psychotherapist tries to change them by running risks and dangers. Often, in fact, the psychotic subject retreats into the harbour immediately after departing and once gone he tries to return back to the harbour from which he left.

The second antagonistic face is the acceptance of love as a journey towards something. But this journey, even if greatly desired, gets coloured with anxieties tied to the loss of the original maternal object and the uncertainties of the journey. Furthermore, the loved object is hit by the hyper-sensorial, which comes up at every fracture or misunderstanding. The psychotic subject, in short, spasmodically desires love and friendship, but is concerned about the journey that these experiences involve. The journey is a movement and movement is in the time matrix, and time is separation and a possible loss. Therefore, it is clear why the psychotic subject asks the therapist for support in this journey. If love means detaching from an original maternal object in order to land on a new object, one that gives him or her the same guarantees as in the original relationship, it is easy to understand why the subject views the possibility of loving a new object both as a powerful desire and as a frightening danger (Kristeva 1987). I have no hesitation in saying that the therapy of the psychotic subject consists of this. It is necessary to let the psychotic subject assume something from his own memory and specifically something that accompanies him in this journey. This is the recognition that there is much more to find in the other than only risk and danger, based on what was hypothesised earlier. This is an important field for interpretation. To interpret with psychotics always means to extend the scope of observation, focusing on anxiety and separation, because it must be filled with actual experiences rather than with visions. Furthermore, it is necessary to concentrate on the hyper-sensorial data: so to speak, we need to open these data, to examine them together, in a way that the visionary object, enriched with other particulars, studied from other angles, loses its apocalyptic features and increasingly obtains a sense of belonging to a human world.

I would like to end this quick discussion on love and friendship in psychosis by mentioning a comparison between how disorientation and visionarity occurs in psychosis and how instead it occurs in some mystic experiences. Doing so will help us to seize the deep differences that occur between psychosis and mysticism, but also to understand that in psychosis there is a strong mystic aspiration, which might be a psychotherapist's task to enhance and guide.

Psychosis and mysticism

The tendency to compare psychosis and mysticism is very old and has often been marked over the years by too many easy and superficial, if not derogatory, modalities (Vannini 2015; Zolla 1997).

But comparison becomes almost inevitable and also useful, as long as the terms of both poles of the comparison itself are known in detail. This more careful and comprehensive knowledge may prevent this comparison from assuming the appearance of an abrupt and disrespectful judgment. Therefore, it is valuable, in the end of a work focused on the capability of love or better on the ability of a psychotic subject to engage in a love relationship, to look at the issue in terms of the similarities and differences between the two areas.

The capability to engage in a love relationship, in fact, always implies the problem of how to approach time, with its implication of loss and disappointment. Moreover, love involves the problem of universality. In fact, in every important love relationship, love for the other tends to be a search for a concentration of values in the other, which goes beyond the other itself and which push one to consider the other, so to speak, as a condensation of goods and meanings. Further, it is possible to consider in the wake of an ancient philosophical tradition that love for the other is a first step towards love for the world and in the end for something which is beyond everything. So when the subject loves, he tends to establish a relation with eternity and to concentrate all of the immensity in another person. Hence, a comparison with the mystic is almost inevitable and, I hope, will highlight the similarities. Moreover, it is all too evident that mysticism is such a wide and varied topic that it would be presumptuous of me even try to treat it in a totally way. So, I shall confine myself to some thoughts in the hope that, in this way, they could contribute to further the discussion of this critical issue.

I would like immediately to say, that the starting point for the comparison could be, in my view, the topic of the relation with the infinite, which we will deal with first on the mystical side and then on side of the psychotic subject. In the mystical position, the infinite is felt as an absence

of something which was felt present and as a presence of something that was felt absent. I mean that to achieve an encounter with transcendence, the mystic has to pass through an immense boundless void. To go further on the topic, we will first deal with the issue on the side of the relation between the subject and things, and after with himself. In fact, this void concerns both the world and himself. Regarding the world, things lose their character and obtain the characteristics of things that simply exist regardless of observation. They exist *per se* and not in relation to who is observing or using them. In this way, everything takes the character of an appearance, an epiphany, an occurrence of something which condenses something else in itself, but whose form is not clear. In terms of relation with himself, in the position of the mystic, the subject must somehow get free of himself or of herself, escape from his or her memories, and, at least in a momentary way, go forward in a land of withdrawal from himself or herself. The same is true for desires, instincts, and aspirations. Renunciation of desires means seeing oneself as part of the whole, as an expression of totality, rather than endowed with an identified subjectivity. This process can be seen, at least in some important mystical doctrines, as a detachment from the habitual experience and as a progression in a land where nothingness seems to dominate unchallenged (Vannini 2015).

It is inevitable that this approach to nothingness involves dramatic anxieties, a sense of loneliness and strangeness, and thoughts of abandonment and betrayal from the other human beings and, for a believer, from God. The dramatic invocation, 'Father, Father, why have you forsaken me', is a good representation itself of this tremendous human experience (Unamuno 2012). Many metaphors are used to describe this transition. Probably the most famous one is the night, the absence of light, and thus of orientation, and also an absence, that becomes an anxiety, that separates definitely the subject from things of life (Giovanni Della Croce 2009). But the central core of this immense void is that, for the mystic, this vacuum becomes an access to God's inability to be spoken. We might say that, for the mystic, the fact itself that God is hidden becomes the way in which God introduces himself (Della Croce 2009). In this regard, several metaphors have been used which try to indicate the stance reached. However, this attitude does not usually continue for more than a few minutes, but which leaves an inviolable memory. An important metaphor concerns the light, which is characterised as obscured by a certain fogginess. A bright cloud, in fact, is used to describe Jesus' vision in transfiguration (Cusano 2013). In various places, the invisible visibility is mentioned. It is as if the visible was at the same time an obstacle and an access door to the invisible. Others talk about an origin point, an initial seed from which the tree or the original light was born, and which is spreading out into the universe (Cusano 2013). But what characterises all these 'impossible' descriptions

is the idea of an absolutely indefinable nature of the divine experience. The transcendent, the godly, is never circumscribable, it cannot be confined in something, it is shapeless, even if it gives rise to shapes. Also, only its unthinkable nature can make itself thinkable. Only in this paradox, which is the root of the mystical, is this experience conceivable. We should remember Meister Eckart, who invokes God to set him free from God himself, as if the worst distortion of the mystic experience was to confer God with either the remote semblance of something personal.

At this point we might resume the topic of the infinity. Trying to get across the infiniteness to reach the infinity is, from the perspective we mentioned shortly, the mystical itinerary itself. But indeed, in this case, the infinity is not only what is outside the space-time coordinates, but beside it is what escapes every definition. Being watched by this infinite and watching this infinite, in a kind of eye contact, is an issue often discussed. This is because both the idea of contact with the infinity and its absolutely unreachableness are nicely captured by the eye concept. This is one way to deal with this issue and will be taken up by Lacan (Cusano 2013). If we want to go further in the discussion, addressing it in a psychoanalytic approach, we dare suggest, in the wake of Fachinelli (Fachinelli 1989) that the mystic experience we are talking about implies some kind of splitting: the subject remains himself and at the same time he dives into the indefinable infinity. In any case, it is also true that another way to experience mysticism exists, which we may define as object immersion. The bodily features of the object, his tremendous physicality, become, from this perspective, the gateway to the divine (Teresa d'Avila 2005; Cimino 2015). But the exasperated concreteness of the object, the hair of a woman, the hardness of a stone, the sparkle of the sea surface, for example, are so hyper-real, that they open the way to infinite transcendence, to a sort of universal which condenses all together in a specific point, while, at the same time, continuing to expand in the immensity.

Then, what characterises the mystic experience in these brief references is, first of all, the ability to bear a void, to handle estranging loneliness, to obscure what is primarily visible, to reach the hidden aspect of light kept within. Subsequently, the capacity to accept the undefined end point, the paradoxical coexistence of presence and absence. And lastly, to bear the pain that comes from the experience of transience and to hope for a reappearance. Therefore, we could conceive of the mystical experience as the capacity to bear an anxiety of loneliness and disorientation, a journey in the direction of nothing. Basically, the mystic is looking for renunciation, but this is underpinned by hope. Also, the mystic expects to experience something which he does not believe to be contributed quickly in an institutional area, but

which may be contributed to the collective, only at the price of exhausting and patient steps (Vannini 2015).

Now we are in an advantageous position to try to compare the mystical experience with the psychotic one. In fact, the psychotic subject feels, as we said, a terrible disorientated feeling in the moment he loses trust in a figure that is a benchmark and gives soundness and support, and which feeds the powerful fantasy that this support will never go away. But differently from the mystic, the psychotic subject cannot handle this estranging loneliness. The relation with the thing, devoid of familiarity, reduced to a simple existence, does not pave the way to a mystical experience, but turns into an ineffable presence, one that is concrete, like ghosts or fairies and anonymous instances, which haunt, as we said before, his house. The visionarity, invoked as an escape from and remedy for the estranging loneliness, becomes an additional source of anxiety. The world is lost in its objective reality, but in the place left, an immediately a parallel world takes over. This world can terrify or comfort, but it drives out the loneliness, replacing it with an unreal or too real presence.

In other words, the psychotic cannot stand the suffering that the mystic, instead, can endure.

In addition, there is not an emptiness in the psychotic world, but an overflow of bizarre objects, to whose description he devotes almost every resource possessed, subtracting them from real life and day-to-day relationships. This is the terrible and exhausting psychotic work: to control or put aside as much as possible his or her visionary constructions. To this purpose he or she dedicates an enormous part of his or her mental and physical activity. In addition, for the psychotic subject, the theme of God's unspeakability is unsolvable. The God of the psychotic subject is always a personal God, endowed with human characters that judge and punish and praise, according to human logic. We might say that the God of psychotics is almost a family person, even if equipped with supernatural power. Bion has underlined that every man must confine the God he has in himself. He meant to say that in every man there is an almighty instance, localised in the magical part of his thoughts, that assumes the shape of a tendency to fuse and to become one with the world, taking in itself the unlimited power of human nature (Bion 1970). This internal God has nothing to do with the mystic's God. It is a friendly or hostile God, but one that is always concentrated on the world, on punishments and on premiums. In the end, the psychotic subject is always self-referential. The divine message is always addressed to him or her, and makes him or her the centre of the world. God thinks of me and everything that happens in the world is about me. This comes from the faith in the

power of magical thought, that in turn becomes the non-distinction between things and words. If I consider things and not words, or better, if things live and act in me, reality becomes thought and thought becomes reality, and so everything refers to me, as a centre of the most salient occurrences in the world. We could say that the famous judgment 'give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God' applies to the psychotic subject as a balance search. However, this balance search is not between State and Church, but between the human and the almighty parts, between thought who knows things (Caesar), and thought who identifies with things and becomes things (God). But things are distorted to the troubled and painful life of the subject.

The therapy, we might say, consists in letting Caesar and God meet: to broaden the objects knowledge, to surround objects with a wider area, to interpret the connection and links themselves. In other words, to allow the objects to rediscover a time-space context. God has to lose his projection from the subject treat and become not an impending presence but an aspiration, one that is never completely feasible. It is slow work, but useful and conceivable.

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