

ARTIGOS
PAPERS

Expressive forms of psychotic language

Formas expressivas da linguagem psicótica

Formas expresivas del language psicótico

1

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Abstract: This study comes from a series of research carried out in some Italian Psychiatric Hospitals. Specifically, the investigation concerns emotional, cognitive and linguistic aspects of psychotic forms of expression. So, we will discuss psychotic expressive language by analysis of an exemplary case report: i. e. commenting on the iconographic and textual productions by a subject in several decades of psychopathological experiences (hundreds of sketches, drawings and paintings, and numerous pages of delusional texts). In this paper, we examine some psychotic expressive codes, and the emotional mode characterizing them. These psychotic expressive codes are linguistic, communicative, referential and they are of importance for artistic creativity. But we especially try to highlight the role of emotional, liberating, cathartic and compensatory functions that the “language of madness” enables patients to express. More in general, we try to regard their specific relational mode, and their being or being-at-world.

Keywords: Psychotic language. Fantastic or imagination delusion. Artistic creativity. Emotive expressive forms.

Resumo: Este estudo resulta de uma série de estudos realizados em algumas instituições psiquiátricas italianas. Especificamente, a investigação diz respeito às formas psicóticas emocionais, cognitivas e linguísticas de expressão. Discute, portanto, formas psicóticas de expressão por meio do exame de um caso clínico de amostra, ou seja, comentando sobre as produções iconográficas e textuais (centenas de esboços, desenhos e pinturas e muitas páginas de textos delirantes) feitas por uma pessoa em diferentes décadas de experiência psicopatológica. Neste artigo, discutem-se as formas psicóticas de expressão e maneiras emocionais que as caracterizam. Portanto, esses códigos de expressão psicótica são linguísticos, comunicativos,

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referenciais e importantes à criatividade artística, mas, acima de tudo, pretende-se destacar o papel emocional, libertador, catártico e compensatório das funções que a “linguagem da loucura” permitir ao doente expressar. E, mais: geralmente, tenta-se considerar o seu modo relacional peculiar e seu ser-para-o-mundo.

Palavras-chave: Linguagem psicótica. Delírios fantásticos ou imaginários. Criatividade artística. Formas de expressão emocional.

Resumen: Este estudio es el resultado de una serie de estudios realizados en algunas instituciones psiquiátricas. Específicamente, la investigación con respecto a las formas de expresión psicótica emocional, cognitiva y lingüística. Discute por lo tanto formas psicóticas de expresión a través del examen de un caso clínico de muestra, es decir, comentando sobre la producción iconográfica y textual (cientos de bocetos, dibujos y pinturas y muchas páginas de textos delirantes) realizados por una persona en diferentes décadas de experiencia psicopatológica. En este artículo vamos a discutir las formas psicóticas de expresión y formas emocionales que las caracterizan. Por lo tanto, estos códigos de expresión psicótica son lingüísticos, comunicativos, referencias y importantes para la creatividad artística. Pero sobre todo, apuntamos a destacar el papel emocional, la catarsis y la liberación de las funciones compensatorias que el “lenguaje de la locura” permite al paciente expresar. Y, más en general, tratamos de considerar su modo relacional peculiar y su ser-para-el-mundo.

Palabras clave: Lenguaje psicótico. Alucinaciones fantásticas o imaginarias. Creatividad artística. Formas de expresión emocional.

1 Paraphrenia and other psychotic forms

If we observe the psychiatric nosographic descriptions, the framework of the psychosis is so broad as to include within it different psychopathological manifestations which only share a symptom: the delusion. We think, for example, of *schizophrenia* with symptoms where one can notice many aspects of ideation and/or disorganized behavior (bizarre delusions, hallucinations, positive formal thought disorder, etc.), or of *delusional disorder* or *paranoia* where lucid delusion is rather the only evident manifestation: not to mention other mixed forms of psychosis. Considering the different poles, or forms of psychosis, schizophrenia and paranoia manifest themselves, therefore, with very different perceptions, emotions, ideas, feelings and premonitions. This is naturally also reflected in the expressive and linguistic forms, and in

subjective reference to whom the patients direct their attention (GALIMBERTI 1979; CUMMINGS 2014; WETTSTEIN 2016).

In this paper we will discuss a case of psychosis considered similar to schizophrenic forms, but with undoubtedly different aspects. In fact, the limited impact of psychotic manifestations or disorganized behaviour, absence of other disorders of thought or disorders of associative connections of ideas, and the evolution of the disease of the subject of this study seem closer to the psychopathological characteristics of *paraphrenia* than to those of paranoid schizophrenia. Rather than for persecution delusion, the psychopathological history of our patient is interesting for the manifestations of megalomaniac grandiosity evident in the fantastic ideation which feeds on its imaginary, mystic and moralistic beliefs. The subject is convinced that he is a new *Messiah Redeemer*, and to have the task of alerting Mankind to the need to redeem themselves from the progressive decay of customs. The conviction of being chosen for the *mission of redeeming Mankind*, of being at the centre of a *divine plan* or to take on extraordinary appearance and exceptional powers is among his fantastic or imagination delusions. These pathological beliefs seem to be something in between disorganized delusional forms and lucid delusional forms. So, despite clearly unusual delusional ideas, one of the characteristics of such psychopathological experiences is to associate imaginary ideas with nonchalance in dealing with other everyday tasks (DUPRÉ, LOGRE 1911; BILIKIEWICZ et al. 1957).

An architect devoted to his studies and archaeological research, the subject of our case report is the author of several hundred of sketches, drawings and paintings. The psychological and psychopathological importance of these works lies not in the artistic content or delusional themes, but in the expressive codes through which he communicates his pathological ideas and emotional modes that distinguish the pictorial codes utilized. So, the main interest of these productions primarily lies in feelings of intense creative activity, and expressive impulses which it manages to bring out. Similarly to coins, a side of the page utilized presents itself as full of textual notes (slogans and/or repetitive delusional formulas), while on the main side of the page a sketch or a drawing (sometimes overlapped by writings) schematize the meaning of the textual message (BUCCA 2015).

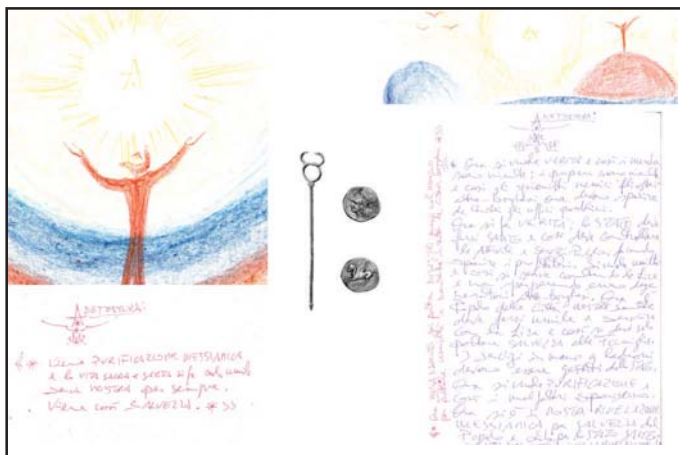
Schizophrenia, paraphrenia and paranoia manifest themselves with quite different psychopathological characteristics: emotive, cognitive,

linguistic and relational ones. However, despite delusional ideation or referential and communicative functions that the other than oneself figures can take on, some elementary emotional needs anchored to expressive and linguistic human nature manage to bring these psychotic forms back to common feeling (BUCCA 2013; 2014).

2 Symbols, words and imaginary places

The psychopathology history of the subject of our study begins when, being interested in archaeological research, he morbidly begins to take an interest in two objects. Of the first one, a bronze caduceus, he has an indirect knowledge through reading and pictures of the British Museum in London. Of the second one, a silver stater of Anaktorion, instead, he has direct knowledge because it is a coin that he himself has found in a series of archaeological excavations. The bronze caduceus and silver stater constitute the main elements of delusional imagination, psychotic experiences and iconographic and textual productions of the architect-archaeologist. (Fig. 1: centre panel).

Fig. 1: Self-portrait, delusional texts, bronze caduceus, and stater of Anaktorion



It seems to us that he identified with the mythological figure of Hermes, the ancient Greek gods. Hermes, in fact, was considered a *messenger* and was represented with a caduceus in his hand: Hermes, in sculptures and pottery, is represented with winged accessories, along with the goddess Athena or horses. In addition, the meaning of the

name Hermes appears to refer to a “heap of stones”, and this also seems to be linked to the graves. All these aspects take on a prominent position in delusional ideation of our case. Meanwhile, he imagines to be a messenger reporting divine words, written and pictorial: he, like Hermes or Jesus Christ, considers himself a Messiah, a medium reporting a divine message (*Dictatum Domini*).

As can be noted from the writings and drawings, the figurative and textual delusional themes of the patient are constituted by invocations *pro salus mundi* to the *volontà di vita* (divine will), invocations to the truth for the salvation of Mankind, the environment and the Earth, or demands for justice, for purification of spirit and of human behaviour, or for “holy leading”, “messianic civilization” and for the “holy family” (Fig. 1: left and right, lower panel). The messages written on drawings or on their back and the statements made during some of our interviews, show the monotonous, repetitive, stereotypical trend of a delusional idea related to the revelation of a psychotic message. In this case too delusional ideas show a very close relationship with the hallucinations, i. e. with the revelations *A dettatura* (dictation) by God’s will reflected in graphics and iconography expression. However, they aren’t tormenting typically schizophrenic hallucinations, but fantastic and comforting exhortations that elevate the patient to “Messia” position, and lead him to divulge his redeeming message.

The various symbols utilized in drawings are always used to specify the same idea. Few simple ideas but many figurative and graphic symbols are needed to try to express them. Let us briefly examine some figurative symbols. For example, the symbols and the signs that our subject uses to indicate a central theme: his idea of God or *Assoluto* (The Absolute). By the term *Assoluto* he indicates God (who reveals himself dictating the delusional message) and peremptory meaning of the divine dictation. The *ssoluto* in drawings is

Fig. 2: Self-portrait



represented by an uppercase letter above a point or an asterisk: [...] *la luce e la stella* ([...] the light and the star) (Fig. 1: up, left and right panels; Fig. 2).

The symbolic use of the “A” letter appears to have originated from his formation as architect and archaeologist. Moreover, this letter is impressed on Anaktorion coins, it is a letter (accented) of “eleà”, it is an initial of the names of the goddesses Athena and Artemis, it is the initial of names given to the fortified site of *Artemisia* and its “Artemis(s)ion” project. Last – coming back from to the idea of *Assoluto* – it is an initial in phrase *A dettatura* that precedes all the delusional writings.

The light and the sun represent the *ssoluto*, in the sun’s core some stylized letters appear (“eleà”) to suggest an acronym that could be conducive to the myth of Helios and the different representations of the Sun God. On many instances of pottery, Helios is represented with a halo of rays on a chariot drawn by winged horses. But God’s idea related to the expression “eleà” could be inspired by his biblical and/or mystic texts readings. Indeed, as regards the ancient name of God, in the *Holy Scriptures* reference is made to the Tetragram. That is, the four Semitic consonants (yhwh) that have been translated as God’s names: Yahweh or Jahvè (LAIRD et al. 1980). Moreover, the ancient Canaanites people venerated El. In the Semitic languages, El represented an archaic divine symbol. So, in this name, they recognized special sacred meanings related to the meaning of God’s idea. Indeed, the “El” letters are at the root of other God’s names. For example, in Eloah’s name, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (CEI, 2008).

However, Elea has also been an ancient colony of Magna Graecia, which like other *polis* had the authority of coining *drammi*, coins similar to staters used in Corinth and at Corinthian colonies such as Anaktorion.

The figurative themes of our subject preferably select the self-portrait. Often the author of the drawings is represented with a pencepter in his hand, or with the stylized features of bronzed Caduceus. Other figurative themes relate to drawings of animals (especially horses and birds) and landscapes. As elsewhere in graphical and textual productions, even in landscape paintings many delusional symbolic elements emerge. In landscape paintings, we notice the studied archaeological sites: the *de-ospedale* (physical, mental, and spiritual recovery-rehabilitation centre), and bronzed caduceus among huge bird claws. In many drawings, the birds are presented with hybrid forms:

they look like doves with wings and claws of raptors. In this case too, as in religious representations, the doves symbolize the Holy Spirit (Fig. 1: up, right panels).

A detail that characterizes drawings and text messages regards the symbols used by the author as self-referential names to sign his works. He usually concludes its work by signing “il Messia” (understood in the third person), “RA-IAKKU” or by the acronym “SMSR”. Obviously,

Fig. 3: Self-portrait



even the chromatic use follows a delusional symbolic itinerary. Everything that has to do with *Assoluto* is painted yellow. The colors red, blue and black are used to delineate self-portrait, or to trace the profile of the landscapes. In addition, blue is used for coloring the acronym “eleà”. So, our subject primarily uses primary colors and rarely – in most detailed drawings – complementary colors: purple, orange or brown (Fig. 1: up panels; Figg. 2 and 3).

It seems evident that the art history lectures, knowledge of the Greek myth of Pegasus (which inspires his representations of horses in drawings), knowledge of the meaning of the mythological figures of the goddesses Artemis and Athena, the characteristics of some coins used in Magna Graecia settlements, and the fact that he holds the bronzed caduceus in high consideration have fuelled the morbid imagination of the architect-archaeologist, leaving its mark in his iconographic and textual production. Indeed, in his psychotic ideation there are still intact traces of the Anaktorion silver stater and of the bronze caduceus. On the basis of these symbolic elements, we can reconstruct the delusional route from studies of ancient archaeological remains (they are also dating from Fifth century BC) leading to imaginary places of “Artemisia”, “Mediluce or light of the Mediterranean”, and “Artemis(s)ion” (BUCCA, 2015).

Here we supply some information, eventually, on names that the author attributes to these places. *Artemisia* is the name of a fortified

settlement built on the ruins of an ancient necropolis whose temple is consecrated in honour of the goddess Artemis. *Mediluce* is the name given to today's city built near the archaeological remains. "Artemis(s)ion" is the name of his project, the *de-ospedale*: the physical, mental, and spiritual recovery-rehabilitation centre. On the site of "Artemisia" and temple to the goddess Artemis we have not found historical and archaeological evidence. Indeed, it seems that an *Artemisio*, i. e. an ancient temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis can be found in a location not far from the sites studied by our architect-archaeologist (CRINÒ, 2013). But there is also the likelihood of a link with the name Artemisia, and with the salient features of this ancient figure that refer to the famous building of the temple-tomb of Halicarnassus. The name *Mediluce* has the characteristics of neologism, these are probably related to the solar orientation of the place of the ancient necropolis. Indeed, regarding the exposure of archaeological site, the author seems to emphasize the light or perhaps the half-light.

However, more than the fantastic delusion themes and/or imagination delusion of the subject of our study, the dual code he uses (iconic and textual), or communicative aspects of his delusional messages, it is the expressive liberating functions which in this case (as in many others) they take on is really relevant to psychopathological and linguistic meanings.

3 Emotive and cathartic languages

Redundant, stereotype, vacuous expressions in our clinical case – differently from the schizophasia language productions (of schizophrenia) or from the rhetorical paranoid claims – they are not incomprehensible, nor take an aggressive and/or boring tone. Furthermore, the opacity of schizophrenic language highlights the lack of an actual subjective reference. While the paranoid argument aims to persuade exclusively institutional figures. Instead, the interlocutors of the architect-archaeologist of our study, those with whom he intends to communicate with his messages and his illustrations, are very vague and generic. We observe, for example, the self-attribution of the name *il Messia*. He, as Jesus Christ, believes himself to be a Messiah appointed to undertake a divine mission. He would be i.e. a *medium*: the *mediator* between men of *dictation* and of *will of Assoluto*.

In this clinical case – despite the communicative importance of

delusional discourse, and despite the interest in the pragmatic implications of some aspects of its indirect discourse – the language has a fundamental emotional function. So, we leave the discussion of pragmatic-conversational implicatures. To deepen the problems related to psychopathology of language, pragmatic disorders or to the subject of indirect discourse, readers can refer to recent studies: Cummings 2014, Wettstein 2016, and Capone 2016ab. For the time being, we focus on the emotional and liberating aspects of linguistic expressions (in general), and psychotic ones (in particular).

The delusional themes of the writings and drawings are intended to reveal and to communicate the morbid ideas of the patient. But in the expressive languages utilized what also strongly emerges is the need for the subject to express himself: just like in schizophrenic poetic experience (JASPERS, 1922). Hence the problem of the limits which the creative ecstasy or expressive languages can trespass, and even feed themselves from a psychopathology state. However, the evolution of morbid manifestations usually stops vital impulse, and creative skills of patients (SASS, 1992).

Despite the use of metaphors, proverbs or stereotyped assonance, in most of psychotic language productions, one cannot speak of poetic language. Indeed, so called “songs of the night and fog” show how the schizophrenic language can be the subject of playful manipulation of words: just look at the language games, the baroque calligraphy or musical salads (PIRO, 1992).

Although they use metaphorical expressive forms, psychotic productions do not seem to highlight particular creative, aesthetic or figurative aspects. So, leaving aside some personal artistic tendencies, pictorial and literary occupations of patients, it seems to meet above all the need to express himself which exerts a centrifugal force due to psychotic feelings. Through use of any symbolic and/or expressive devices (i.e. of iconic, pictorial, poetry languages, etc.), those suffering from a mental disorder try to project their delusional experiences in artistic representations, thus diverting their morbid imagination towards alternative modes of expression and/or compensatory modes (BUCCA, 2013, 2014).

Nevertheless, some cultural currents and psychopathology of the early twentieth century have considered the artistic creations of patients works of art. Indeed, most of pictorial works exposed originally in so-

called *atelier* of mental hospitals were considered art forms, and expressive kind of psychotic artists were considered typical of *Compagnie de l'Art Brut* (VOLMAT, 1956). But, apart from attempts to identify specific forms of psychotic art, psychopathological analysis of patient creations has been directed toward the consideration of the therapeutic potential of different expression forms related to madness. The *psychopathologie de l'expression*, therefore, has been characterized as art therapy, and today is a most relevant field of occupational therapy (BOBON, 1962; MACCAGNANI, 1966). At the moment when the psychopathological manifestations tend to hinder the communication possibilities of patients, art therapy forms allow them to experience new emotional ways, new feelings in personal identity representation and new modes communication and relationships to others. In order to rid themselves of the deep disturbances of their delusional experiences, psychotic subjects with their productions (unconsciously) seek to make leverage on expressive devices available to signify experience.

If the fate of madness seems to be that patients are lost in the search of the hidden senses of words, the language provides the opportunity to silence hallucinatory voices and the most insidious delusional torments. Many clinical histories show that different expressive languages, facilitating emotional and cathartic processes, may dismiss delusional obsessions in one's thoughts. In this case, we refer to original sense of catharsis, i. e. to the ancient ritual of purification of the soul and body. This is, therefore, a different conception from Aristotelian *catharsis*; it is a question of empathy feelings you have when confronted with any literary, theatrical, musical, poetic, pictorial representation; or confronted with any work of art.

Psychotic subjects, with their expressive languages, experience liberation and purification feelings, and a kind of emotional involvement that comforts them when faced with distressing delusional thoughts. In the psychoanalysis context too, it is considered that the cathartic functions are at the root of sublimation processes of conflicting impulses. In these cases, language – apart from cognitive and communicative functions – takes on an extraordinary importance for the emotive functions and cathartic mechanisms that it allows schizophrenic subjects to activate. Therefore, among the various expressive forms, the “language of madness” (iconic, pictorial, mimetic, poetic, literary, etc.) pushes the subjects off from the imaginary obsessions of patients.

Conclusions

The language of madness, as can be seen from the brief analysis of this study, is of fundamental importance in allowing liberating, cathartic and compensatory functions. Through liberating expressive languages, the psychotic subjects project their delusional experiences in painting, literary and/or poetic productions. These languages allow patients to divert morbid imagination towards emotive, cognitive and relational alternative modes. Indeed, using these expressive forms, the psychopathology of expression constitutes one of the most engaging sectors of occupational therapy for the treatment of psychosis. So, even if for a short time, these emotive and linguistic processes give patients a chance to re-find a bearable psychological balance, and create new escape routes from delusional feelings and manipulative psychotic tendencies.

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