

BRUNO CALLIERI: PERPLEXITY AND THE RISK OF PSYCHOSIS

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This issue of *COMPRENDRE*, the glorious journal that under the direction of Lorenzo Calvi and now of Gilberto Di Petta has been and is in Europe a banner of phenomenological psychopathology, is unquestionably a special opportunity which finds us gathered together around an empty place. Bruno Callieri is gone – we shall no longer hear from his own voice his many profound and original contributions to psychopathology, which have been and certainly will be points of reference for us and for anyone who takes a serious and passionate interest, with curiosity and temerity, respect and humility, in psychic suffering. We shall no longer be able to live in that atmosphere charged with teachings, but also with dazzling perspicacity, that Bruno emanated around himself, together with his exceptional capacity to transform every encounter into a relationship and to tend towards an irresistible I-You mode.

In one of his books, he wrote that he «wanted to be a guide more to mystery than to knowledge, more to respect than to conquest, more to the journey than to the destination»: this statement is not a mere ethical program but mature advice about the only way of being that can bring us closer to (that of) the person encountered.

I think Bruno would have been pleased to be remembered with the Psalm that Martin Buber liked so much that he had it engraved on his tomb in Jerusalem: «Nevertheless I am always with you» (Psalm 73: 23).

We have all been, maybe even without his knowing it, students of Bruno Callieri, following paths to knowledge similar to trails through a forest, given that – as Karl Jaspers used to say – phenomenological psychopathology is a reserve of anomalies, but thanks to Bruno, some of these trails have managed to open up into clearings, and all of us were aware of the limited nature of these albeit luminous clearings, often surrounded by others' proud certainties.

I have chosen to remember here my dear friend and great teacher by commenting on one of his writings, and among the many remarkable, deeply profound and highly original writings he left us, I have focused attention on the one on the world of the perplexed.

In his 1993 edition, Callieri wrote that he had chosen the topic of perplexity for three reasons:

1) because from the clinical-diagnostic point of view, perplexity is a frequent but rather tricky element of importance for differential diagnostic aims. That is to say, Callieri stresses the hypothesis of a role played by the condition of perplexity as a matrix in and towards diverse psychopathological developments;

2) because from the phenomenological standpoint, perplexity gives us access to the dissolution of normal categories, of the globalization of *Dasein*, and gives us that access in a particular moment in which delusional themes have not yet formed, even though opening up to the mind's disposition to become delusional;

3) because the phenomenology of intersubjectivity and perplexity, representing this acute crisis of coexistence, shows the breaking down of communication with others and its tendency to reconstitute itself in the world of alienation and no longer in that of otherness.

Furthermore – Callieri goes on – perplexity impacts me as a body, me as *in-der-Welt-sein*, me as project, me as intentionality. «Perplexity is the loss of the body as an intermediary of the manipulability of the world».

Already from these first insights by Callieri about the condition of perplexity, it is not surprising that recent research (2011) devoted to *Self-experience in the Early Phases of Schizophrenia*, which makes an attentive follow-up analysis of the precursory phenomena most at risk for turning into schizophrenia, confirms, alongside disturbances in the experience of the I, the significance of the condition of perplexity. Callieri's seminal psychopathological and phenomenological studies

are not cited, despite their importance in shedding light on the aspects of essence which define the perplexed person's world.

In reality, Callieri began studying perplexity as early as the 1950s in his work as a researcher at the psychiatric clinic of Heidelberg, alongside Kurt Schneider. Callieri reports that Schneider doubted he could consider perplexity to be a mere symptom and advised Callieri to start from a study of the "quality of being known" (*Bekanntheisqualität: Bq*). Bq which, the Author specifies, lets itself be identified by pathic, not noetical, states, is deficient in the state of perplexity, where «estrangement from the world and from oneself, the premonition of something unsettling, the tone of mystery: all this is the opposite of being known: it is the uncanny».

Callieri writes that he wanted to move strictly on the ontical level, the plane of existence, in other words how perplexity is, and not pass over to the ontological aspects. On this plane, and if we understand perplexity as the impossibility to unify objective data into a non-contradictory whole, then it encompasses also states of "bewilderment" that can arise normally, in a transitory manner and in particular conditions.

From the pathological standpoint, one can encounter perplexity in burgeoning schizophrenia, and in this case perplexity is a moment preceding *Wahnstimmung* and is in any case distinguished from momentary bewilderment by the subject's inability to move out of it by making a decision.

I cannot help quoting Callieri's wonderful description of the perplexed person's world (1993):

The world of the perplexed is an unclear, undetermined, imprecise, vague world, in which communication is always insufficient, the haloes of meaning are too vast, fadings are constant or almost constant. Univocal determinations of relationship are completely missing. The thymic dominates everything. There is a real and proper eclipse or dissolution of form. Experience of one's personal corporeity is seen to be significantly impeded, invalidated, broken, not only as somato-psychic personalization but also as situational consciousness.

It is clear even from these hints that the topic of perplexity leads Callieri to target his attention on some focal points, one of which is the twilight of intersubjectivity («Perplexity is precisely the most radical problematization of intersubjectivity»; 2001), and thus its closeness to the basic psychotic disorder. I would like very briefly to attempt to clarify the concept of basic disorder in psychopathology and the con-

cept of constitution of intersubjectivity as they appear to me. Certainly, “basal” phenomenon has different meanings in psychopathology. “Fundamental disorder”, or underlying disorder, is an expression close to Minkowski’s concept of “trouble générateur”, disconnected from any type of etiopathogenetic sense, but a fundamental disorder understood instead as a device capable of giving a unitary sense to the psychopathological syndrome examined. As opposed – for example – to Blankenburg, who explores the underlying psychotic and pre-psychotic condition as an alteration of the naturalness of the evident that conditions and expresses the “possibilities for a relationship with the Self and the World”, De Clérambault, and also Hüber, use “elementary” or “basal” in the two senses of a nuclear element of psychotic phenomenality, but also of a direct consequence of biological alteration.

The *daseins*-analytic analysis is aimed conversely at «highlighting an underlying anthropological-structural moment and analyzing it more closely» and at «illuminating what in schizophrenics is disturbed at the base of their being-human» (Blankenburg). When I consider the relation between the dimension of intersubjectivity and basal disorder I am referring to the latter in an anthropo-phenomenological sense.

It is truly impossible to approach the relation between underlying disorder in schizophrenia and intersubjectivity without taking autism into consideration (Ballerini). With the work of Eugen Bleuler, his insight into the phenomenon he called “autism” and its fundamental phenomenological *illumination* carried out by Minkowski, we have acquired a possible tool for moving from a description of symptoms to the *eidōs*, the essence, of the spectrum of schizophrenic disorders. But autism is already a global structuring of a way of being (to the point that it contains also many defensive aspects; cf. Manfred Bleuler), a style of life that if centered on the precariousness of the transcendental constitution of the Other as subject, expresses also the effort of the “empirical” I to make up in some way for the deficiency of the “transcendental” I. It is an attempt to guarantee in any case an *autōs*, a Self (Blankenburg), despite the fact that the crisis in the constitution of the Other, constitution that is *normally* co-constitutive of selfness, inevitably casts a shadow over the subject.

Autism is thus a way of being; it constitutes itself in a pathological style of life. Perplexity, conversely, is a sort of loss, generally temporary and acute, of the subject’s place in the world, a fall into the inability to make plans, the impossibility of making a decision, «a pervasive difficulty in grasping the familiar and taken-for-granted meanings» (Parnas *et al.*), a loss of the usual hierarchy among different meanings. Obviously, all this suspends for the perplexed person the possibility of

finding a place in an intersubjective world, of entering into relation, and what is more, at least in pre-schizophrenic perplexity, this condition involves the experience of the Self, because «it is the finding-oneself-like-this that is flooded with a sinister light, that is uncanny, unheimlich» (Callieri, *ibid.*). An interesting problem, especially when perplexity is examined as a precursory state to schizophrenia, is the study of the perplexed person's sense of time. Seeking a typological organization of the structures of meaning and trying to identify some psychopathological ordinative elements of a higher level than symptomatological fragments, psychopathology has carried out an attempt to found an objective science – in the sense of rigor and communicability – of subjective phenomena, a research, through the “epochè”, the “eidetic variation”, and the search for “essence”, into how the person defines himself and onto what possible kind of world he looks out. In this sphere, “temporality” is constitutive, a temporality that is obviously not the time marked by clocks, but neither is it purely “time lived”, if by this we mean merely “experienced” or “felt”, because, conversely, in the concept of “temporality” time in and of itself does not necessarily become the content of experience, but is a parameter of sense which constitutes the various modes of presence.

Viewed from the perspective of the writings on phenomenology by Kimura Bin, the problem then is: what form of anguish corresponds to each mode of existence, and thus to each constituent temporality? The problem is intriguing and complex right here in the sphere of schizophrenic disorders, which do not have melancholy's a-historical and impersonal fall, and for which above all we lack a satisfactory and accepted definition, and the diagnosis of schizophrenia – Blankenburg ironically observes – quite often tells us more about the school to which the psychiatrist belongs than about the patient; and, secondly, even if the greatest part of psychopathological commentary about schizophrenia has focused on the *positive* phenomena and first and foremost on delusion, which has offered many points of insight to *Daseinanalyse*, but in truth schizophrenic illness resembles a course in which delusion appears in any case secondary, perhaps already distant from the underlying phenomena; and finally, in perhaps a more emphatic manner than in other psychopathological syndromes, the structure of schizophrenic temporality, characterized by a disproportionate prevalence of the future, is closely connected with the problem of the schizophrenic's identity.

In effect, the “I” (but I could say: the identity) which is problematic in the schizophrenic is not the I which “has already been” but the future possibility of being “him-self”. The *ante festum* (Kimura) manner of being in time, stretching generically towards the future, allusively

towards freedom and revolution, belongs (also) to the manner of being schizophrenic, in which there is something like an exasperation of V. von Weizsacker's thesis that «the subject is not a secure possession, but to possess it one needs to conquer it over and over again without ceasing».

In effect, one form of anguish observable in schizophrenics is a sort of anguish about the unknown future, the unpredictable, whatever could happen at any moment that is not yet the present. Persons tending towards schizophrenia often and painfully exert themselves to grasp presentiments, even vague ones, and distant omens, which combined with this extraordinary sensitivity sometimes results in an indifference to the things of the present. Behind this way of experiencing time by focusing on the future lies the schizophrenic problem of the constitution of the person's subjectivity, which is never possessed once and for all, but must always be conquered again, in the next moment, so that «the reason for being able to be oneself is always situated farther ahead of the Self» (Kimura).

In the terms of P. Ricoeur's analysis, one could say that the schizophrenic identity, outstretched as it is in a future-oriented temporality, is in reality a search for an always elusive "ipse" that moves constantly, flickering in a future that is always yet to be reached. It is an identity which lacks just this support of the selfsameness of the "idem". The quintessence of the "idem" is the security supplied by one's role in society, albeit with a range of possible changes of situation, and this continuity is a pillar to which, for example, the pre-melancholic clings, so that if this – for him prevalent – dimension of his identity is placed in crisis, it is the fundamental "loss" that exposes his existence to a fall into melancholy. On the contrary, the pre-schizophrenic person runs the risk of embarking on a psychotic course often right when his life circumstances, and the developments of the evolutionary stages, require of him precisely the assumption of a role.

The *ante festum* structure which manifests itself in its most extreme form in the being-in-the-world of the schizophrenic and the *post festum* structure, which is exemplarily found in the being-in-the-world of the melancholic, seem to be the two fundamental, diametrically opposed structures that divide the relations with oneself and with the world into two large categories. The essential point for the schizophrenic is the problem of his possibility of being the same he, the problem of the guarantee of being able to become him-self – in other words, it is a question of the risk of being alienated from the non-I. The anguish and shudder with which the schizophrenic faces any hurried decision are due to the fact that, each time, he places his I's critical possibility to be

able to be him-self or not at risk, as Kimura makes clear (*ibid.*). In the most acute stages of schizophrenia the person has undoubtedly lost his identity as “being the same” and seems to be in search of a “being him-self”, immersed in a temporality that struggles to come out of the unlivable timeless moment which is the acute schizophrenic state, and often the initial one, facing onto a risky future full of uncertainty and presages. It is precisely this “timeless moment” that Callieri identifies as pertaining to the state of perplexity.

*The perplexed person lives in an a-historical moment. The experiences of the past lose their intrinsic time, become homogenized, lose their perspective and depth [...] Everything is fleeting, unsubstantial, superficial, one-dimensional [...] The perplexed person sets himself up in the temporality of the moment, in a mere getting lost in the present. (Callieri, *ibid.*)*

The obviousness of the relations and bonds that normally bind together and separate the “extensions of the mind” (Augustine), the “temporal ecstasies” (Husserl) in which the present is the site of the presence of the present, the presence of the past, and the presence of the future, is no longer graspable in the perplexed person. We know of psychopathological syndromes, for example the way of being of the borderline personality, centered almost exclusively on the present, on the almost exclusive preoccupation with the time of the present, but what characterizes the perplexed person is his a-structural condition with regard to time, and more than living in the present, he gets lost in the present, as Callieri observes.

Moreover, his own body, his *Leib*, is no longer for the perplexed person the medium which connects him to the world and to others, and well beyond the normal ambiguity that between *Koerper* and *Leib* inheres in the lived experience of the body, what is in crisis is the subject’s very constitution in intersubjectivity. Callieri makes the failure of the world of intersubjectivity the keystone of pre-psychotic and psychotic perplexity. Here he refers to Husserl in the *Cartesian Meditations* and his definition of the basic ways of perceiving the person one has in front of him, among which is “*appresentation*”, which is in essence presentation of the Other as a subject similar to me and represents the first core of the process, Husserl’s *Paarung*, that makes up the first step of intersubjectivity.

Callieri concludes, then, that «the constituent moment of the perplexed person is the failure of *apperception*» (Callieri, *ibid.*). Thus he anticipates and inserts his research on perplexity, which he would have

liked to maintain on the “existential-ontic” plane, into the new paradigm according to which the problem is no longer simply the pathological experience, but the constitution of the subject, a going beyond the *Erlebnis* to the Self. The crisis in interpersonal relation and communication (the perplexed person’s «precarious and insufficient way of articulating oneself to others», Callieri writes) in psychoses is much more than a crisis in the transmission-reception of a message. This loss marks the crisis of intersubjectivity, and the alterations observable in the structure of interpersonal encounter must not be viewed as secondary manifestations, like an instrumental *outcome* of the psychotic disorder, but make up its structuring core. The reciprocity and naturalness of exchange with another become in psychosis problematic from the outset, and this crisis makes conspicuous by its absence, *in statu detrahendi*, the fundamental value of the Other, of the intersubjective dimension of the world, as co-constitutive of the person itself. «This means that within the vitally flowing intentionality in which the life of an ego-subject exists, every other ego is already from the beginning intentionally involved through the means of empathy and the empathetic horizon» (Husserl, 1929).

But a deficiency in the normal intersubjective foundation does not mean the disappearance of the Other, even if the «the You no longer lends itself to the constitution of an Us» (Cargnello), and research has shown that the transcendental function that originally constitutes the other as a subject is inextricably constitutive, I repeat, also of one’s own ipse-ness, so that the crisis of the intersubjective dimension of the world of life is like a fault line through the earth’s crust from which the schizophrenic earthquake can spring forth. Besides, when we speak of the world of life we are talking about intersubjectivity, because this is the world of human presence.

Bruno Callieri’s writing on the condition of perplexity is to my mind a magnificent text also because it is an example of continuous reworking. In the phenomenological sense – Callieri points out – one can say that perplexity is also the paralysis of *being in the world* in that it is the abnormal, unspecific diffusion of the “intention” of meaning, and the related suspension of the “achievement” of meaning.

In recent years I have reread several times the versions the Callieri offers on perplexity, and a little observation came to me which I never told Bruno about, not because I did not know him well enough to do so, but because the time and occasion never arrived, and now, in his memory, I write it down for you.

The liquefaction of meanings, which makes everything become a “halo” for the perplexed person, has seemed to me to be readable also on the basis of Husserl’s second Cartesian meditation, the one in which he brings into focus the concept of “horizon of meanings”. In effect, for phenomenological analysis the intentional consciousness never finds itself looking at one sole, given, unchanging, precise meaning, but has in front of it a horizon of meanings in which alongside central, manipulable meanings exist many others as possibilities that are increasingly in the shadows and increasingly immersed in the unmanifest and distant from Bq, from the quality of being known – that is to say – in the final analysis, from intersubjective common sense, towards which healthy habituality is pulled like an elastic band.

For Husserl, each state of consciousness possesses an intentional horizon whose characteristic is to refer to the potentialities of consciousness that pertain to this same horizon. Each perception always has a halo or horizon, like pre-traced-out potentialities. In other words, the multiplicity inherent in every *cogito* is not exhausted by the description of the *cogitata* going on. «This leaves in indeterminacy [...] it is a contained moment of perceptive consciousness itself: it is precisely what constitutes the horizon» (Husserl). All in all – Husserl points out – the horizon of perception contains possibilities that would be available to us if we had given another direction to the course of perception, if instead of turning our eyes in a certain way we had addressed our gaze elsewhere, if we had taken a step forward or sideways, and so on.

Moreover, there is always a “halo” of past perceptions, a potentiality of memories that can be summoned forth, lined up in the back of one’s mind up to the present perception. More clearly still: «Every *cogito*, in that it is consciousness, is [...] signification of the thing it is considering, but this signification surpasses in every instant what, in that very instant, is given as explicitly considered» (*ibid.*).

In other words, there is always “something more” which extends out beyond our current perception of meaning, our current achievement of meaning.

These insights concerning the way the subjectivity of perceptive consciousness proceeds have raised the topic, and the problem, of the phenomenological unconscious, understood as part of consciousness itself, given that we do not unveil a hidden world once and for all, but rather never stop giving shape to the things of the world, bringing into the light what can be implicit, hidden, in the shadows, making it manifest because «the unmanifest surrounds us on all sides, like the silence between words» (Charbonneau). An interesting use of the phenomenological device of the horizon of meanings is the study carried out by

Schwartz, Wiggins and Spitzer, in the wake of Blankenburg, Dorr-Zegers and others, on thought disorders and deluded thought. Given that “horizon” means the entire field of meanings, both implicit and explicit, that a person can experience in a given moment, a comparison was made between the spectrum of meanings graspable in normal cases and the horizon’s expansion in pre-delusional psychotic conditions. Pre-delusional in that they are conditions in which the delusion, properly speaking, can emerge – which is, all things considered, a sort of *Diktat* of meanings – and which can be interpreted as an attempt at confronting, coping with, a pathologically expanded horizon.

Nonetheless we can, within certain limits, interrogate each horizon as to what is implied in it, what can be made explicit, revealed. This possibility, aside from pathological conditions, obviously varies according to the persons and the situations in which they find themselves. But too, every object perceived always has two faces: one is its practical-rational meaning which makes an object something that can be handled, and the other has a physiognomic-expressive character.

Even our concrete world is, in the last analysis, interwoven with physiognomic traits: there is no object on the horizon of our environment that does not possess, alongside its abstract categorical configuration, also an “expression” of its own, that is not animated or in some way “tuned-in” to the perceiver and that therefore is not able, in its fundamental nature as a phenomenon, to capture our attention. The mute language of things comes back to speak of poetry [...] because in the most subtle sympathetic receptivity of the poet the intimate language of things really achieves expression (von Gebattel).

The perceptive-physiognomic characteristics, which take on major importance in the psychopathology of delusion, as in that of phobia and obsession, nonetheless in normality do not go so far as to impose themselves, eclipsing the “practical” meanings, emerging autonomously and in such a way as to overwhelm the other qualities of the object of perception. Thus, Stanghellini and I (1992) gave as an example, one can grasp in a green dress not the “utilizable” meaning of a piece of clothing that can protect the wearer from the cold, but an invitation to hope; in the falling of a leaf not the approach of autumn but a sign alluding to the destiny of decay; in a knife, not a tool for slicing bread, but a death threat, etc. In the development of a psychotically deluded world – which is what interests us here – the pronounced sensitivity to grasping the expressive characteristics is joined with a pervasiveness of

these characteristics, an impossibility to recognize them as products of the activity of one's own mind, but instead the perception of them as announcements, messages, signs, that allude to the subject (*tua res agitur*) and underlie the delusion.

But if we, following an aim of psychiatric phenomenology of today, attempt to trace back from the phenomenon to the terrain where it originated, then Bruno Callieri's research on the condition of perplexity becomes of major importance. Major importance not only because of the profundity of his research but also because it is a logical consequence of the investigation of the basal modifications of the psychotic consciousness. But to continue with the comparison to an elastic band, in the perplexed person its force is lost and the intention of meaning is diluted and dispersed in the "halo" that pertains to that same horizon, and thus the achievement of meaning becomes impossible.

I am certain that Bruno would not be bothered, but rather stimulated, by this trace of harmony between his insights on a phenomenon like perplexity that is so central to understanding psychoses and several theorems of Edmund Husserl. And perhaps this is also a way out for me, an attempt to try to get beyond our loss.

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