

The subject of psychosis: a Lacanian perspective

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- Lacan: Innovation in psychoanalysis
- 4 era's in Lacan's work on psychosis:

1940s: I

1950s: S

1960s: S – R – *a*

1970s: RSI



→ Today: focus on Lacan's structural approach of psychosis

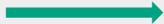
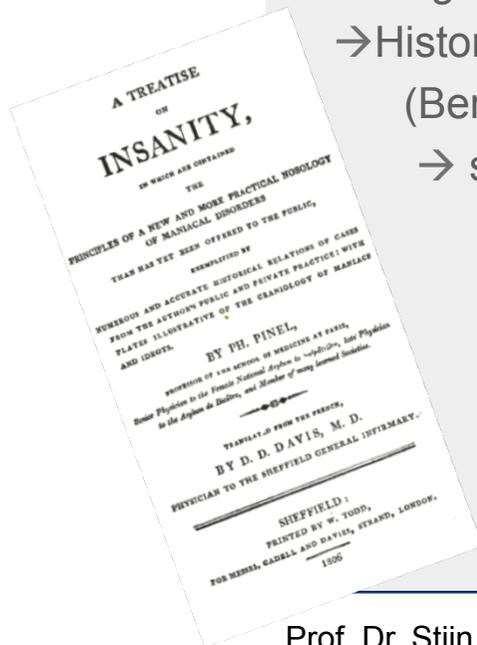
- Core symptoms DSM : **delusions and hallucinations**

- **Delusion** in DSM-IV = “distortions in thought content” or “erroneous beliefs that usually involve a misinterpretation of perceptions or experiences”

→ cognitive disturbance, synthetic disturbance.

→ Historical: “fixed false opinion or belief with regard to objective things”
(Berrios, 1996)

→ see Pinel (1806): madman lost his mind.



OF all the afflictions to which human nature is subject, the loss of reason is at once the most calamitous and interesting. Deprived of this faculty, by which man is principally distinguished from the beasts that perish, the human form is frequently the most remarkable attribute that he retains of his proud distinction. His character, as

→ Difference between belief and delusion?

→ Richard Dawkins (2006) 'The God Delusion': "a persistently false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence"

→ difference in number of believers?

→ Pechey (2012): 48% paranormal experiences, 39% delusional convictions, 25% bizarre delusional convictions → psychotic?

Hallucinations

“A man who has the intimate conviction of an actually perceived sensation, while no external object apt for provoking this sensation is within his field of perception, is in a state of hallucination” (Jean-Etienne Esquirol, 1838)

Henri Ey (1973): “perceptions without perceptible object ”

“any perceptual experience in the absence of external stimuli” (Allen, Laroi, McGuire, & Aleman, 2008)

“*Hallucinations* are perception-like experiences that occur without an external stimulus. They are vivid and clear, with the full force and impact of normal perceptions, and not under voluntary control. They may occur in any sensory modality, but auditory hallucinations are the most common in schizophrenia and related disorders. Auditory hallucinations are usually experienced as voices, whether familiar or unfamiliar, that are perceived as distinct from the individual's own thoughts. The hallucinations must occur in the context of a clear sensorium; those that occur while falling asleep (*hypnagogic*) or waking up (*hypnopompic*) are considered to be within the range of normal experience. Hallucinations may be a normal part of religious experience in certain cultural contexts.” DSM-5, pp.87-88



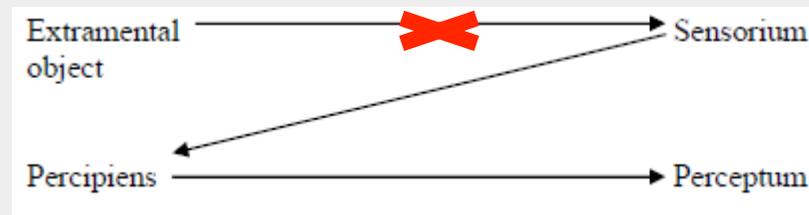
Unique for hallucinations?

- *Perceptions without external stimulus?*
- *Clear sense of reality*
- *No intentional control*
- *In the awake state*

What about Ignatius of Loyola?

Very frequently on a clear moonlight night there appeared in the courtyard before him an indistinct shape which he could not see clearly enough to tell what it was. Yet it appeared so symmetrical and beautiful that his soul was filled with pleasure and joy as he gazed at it. It had something of the form of a serpent with glittering eyes, and yet they were not eyes. He felt an indescribable joy steal over him at the sight of this object. The oftener he saw it, the greater was the consolation he derived from it, and when the vision left him, his soul was filled with sorrow and sadness.

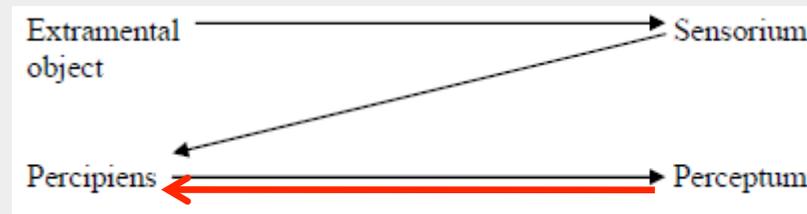
Classic scholastic theory of perception (Thomas Aquinas): Mechanical model of causation



- Within this logic: hallucination = perceptum without object
- Effect: question about the cause (perceptual and/or cognitive processing of stimuli) stands to the fore

- C1: sensorial quality of hallucinations doesn't really matter, E.g. congenitally profoundly deaf people
→ 'hearing' is not essential, what counts is the effect of the heard → signification.
- C2: the *percipiens* is only unifying/synthetic to the extent that a person makes use of the dimension of "the imaginary."
→ patients experience voices as inconsistent with mental life; as paradoxical ↔ visions
→ no accent on the construction of perception, but on the effect of perception on the perceiver

- Lacan: the synthetic unifying tendency reflects only one dimension of the way a person relates to the world. The other dimensions Lacan discerns are “the symbolic” and “the real.”
- The symbolic = the inherently structured way in which we experience the world. The real refers to all things we are not able to get to grips with.



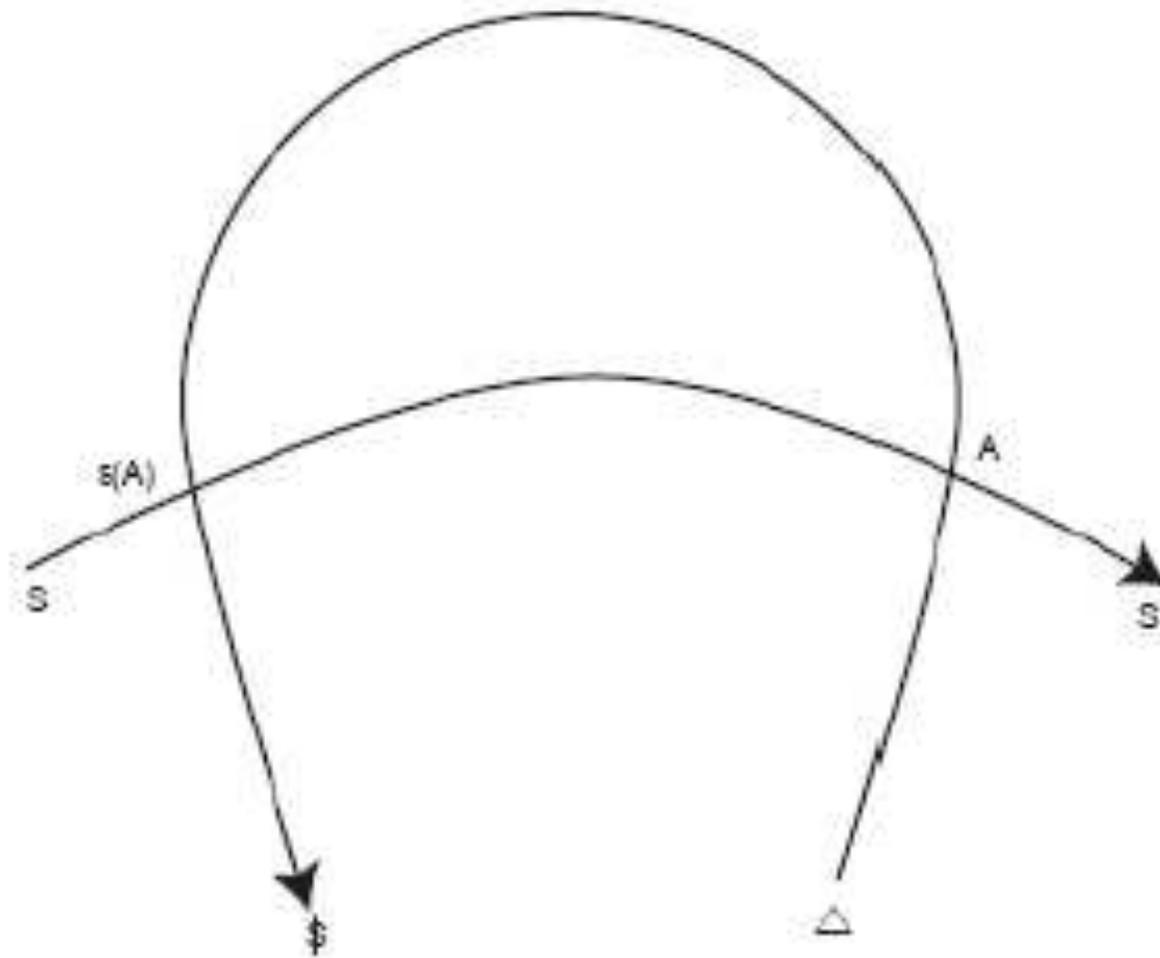
- Hallucinating individuals don't coincide with their perceptions: perceptions 'divide' the perceiving individual
- Lacan subverts the question of how a hallucinating *percipiens* produces erroneous *percepta*, and turns it into a question of how the hallucinated *perceptum* affects the *percipiens*.

Different approach: rather than a *perceptum* without an object, a hallucination is a *perceptum* that has a paradoxical effect on the *percipiens*.

No focus on the cause and the sensorial qualities of hallucinations, but on the structure and the subjective effect of perceptions

→ Lacanian psychoanalysis = structural, not a causal theory

- No focus on biological and neuropsychological aspects, but on the triggering context. Context = Symbolic: speech + exchanges between people.
- Assumption: hallucinations have an internal structure, which is characterised by language-based articulation



A hallucination is an unchained signifier

On the structure of hallucinations, and their paradoxical effects:
Case Lacan (1955); clinical case presentation:

- Young woman; délire à deux; intrusion
- Lacan: asking for details
- Intrusion – neighbours– disrupt
- E.g. one day as she crossed the hallway of their apartment building, she was offended by the neighbor's lover: hallucination of hearing the offensive term “sow” → confused → paradoxical effect

- “irruption in the real ”; for the patient a hallucination comes out of the blue; it is an encounter with an unimaginable element that imposes itself from outside of mental life; “a sudden emergence of total strangeness”
- Rupture in the process of signification
- Proces of signification: signifiers are linked in chains (metonymy), starting from an intention we make use of language
 - meaning arises via interpunction (metaphor)
 - subject = effect of connotation

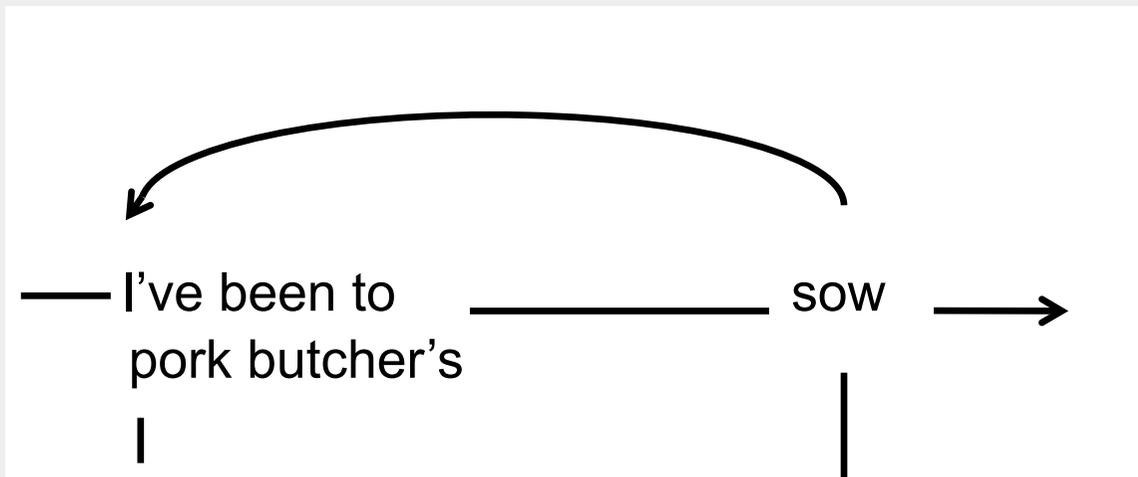
- Lacan = the hallucinated *perceptum* is basically a signifier, an “unchained signifier,” it is in terms of an interruption within the signifying chain (metonymy) that the logic of the hallucinatory experience should be understood.
- E.g. Case: “sow” is an unchained signifier;
 - Lacan suggests that any relevant intervention should try to locate this signifier within the chain of signifiers from which it emanated (diachronic); situating the hallucination in the actual circumstances that led to its production
 - E.g. What did she say to the man in the hallway?: “I’ve just been to the pork butcher’s ”
 - sentence is alluding and incomplete

- “I’ve just been to the pork butcher’s ” is allusive and incomplete
 - allusive: problems in specifying what it means, and why exactly she said this to that man.
 - Allusive: grammatically speaking: As it is her own utterance, it introduces her as the subject of the phrase, reflected by the pronoun “I.” On the other hand the predicate “have just been to the pork butcher’s” fails to provide her with a meaningful position towards this particular man with his particular reputation in the corridor → no articulation of the subject
 - Man = someone she cannot understand or grasp in terms of her own image.

- such an encounter with a ‘Real’ Other calls into question one’s Symbolic “existence as a subject”. It raises the question of who she is, as a woman, in relation to men, and it also touches the issue of what it is that ties a man and a woman.
- Precisely upon her confrontation with the question of her existence as a subject, punctuation on her identity is deferred. In terms of the logic of signification this implies that the anticipatory suspension, which is inherent to the use of the signifier, remains pending.
- provokes a feeling of enigma and tension in the psychotic subject.

— I’ve been to —  — sow —→
pork butcher’s

- the appearance in the real of the signifier “sow” solves this tension and retroactively binds the suspension that marks the constituent “I’ve just been to the pork butcher’s.” The sudden appearance of the hallucinated signifier installs the punctuation that was thus far deferred, and results in the generation of a meaning.
- offense



- Example demonstrates impossibility of subjective positioning in relation to a man
- Broader context: difficulties man-woman relationship
 - married; on the run;
 - fear farmers will kill her; like a sow ...

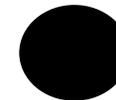
Theory beyond the example:

Lacan: acute psychotic symptoms indicate that something at the level of the existence of the subject has been questioned: hallucination is reactive (sic. Freud: 'attempt to cure'; attempted solution)

- Characteristic issues:
 - Being man / woman
 - Being a partner
 - Being child/parent
 - Being alive

- Psychosis = no internalisation of conventional ideas that generate dialectical conflict; and that generate 'I' versus 'Other' : 'foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father'
- Existence based questions ('who am I?') en intentions ('what do I/you want ?) are a problem:

-Being man / woman
-Being a partner
-Being child/parent
-Being alive



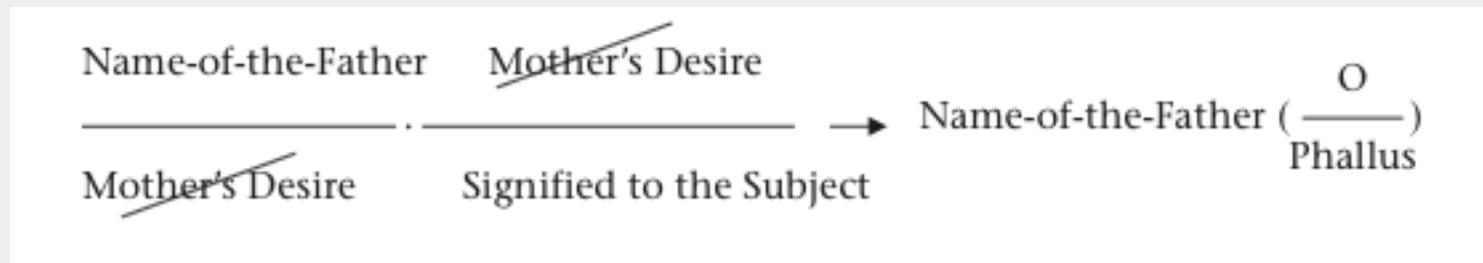
- Treatment is solution-centered: helping someone to 'exist'

- Foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father; paternal metaphor

$$\frac{S}{\mathcal{S}'} \cdot \frac{\mathcal{S}'}{x} \rightarrow S \left(\frac{I}{s} \right)$$

- E.g. You are the rock on which I will build my church

- Metaphor of the Name-of-the-Father



- Psychosis: no signification of the other's intentions (Mother's desire; 'what do you want?') + no desire-related signification of the subject ('who am I?' at the level of O)

case Mario:

- Imagined person on shoulder 'Sue'. He talks with her aloud; she talks to him (Mario moves lips, but tells that Sue speaks); they have entire conversations (see Vanheule, 2011, *Mental*).

casus Mike:

- Fled from his apartment. Neighbor always knocked radiator central heating to 'abuse' him. Knows about pedophilia networks via newspaper; link with neighbor. Hears voices of politician who has nasty plan.

→ psychiatric: both have delusions and hallucinations

→ But, subjective experience is entirely different

case Mario:

- Conversations Mario-Sue bear witness to defence: Mario laughs about Sue's 'rude' messages; performs actions in relation to Sue that don't occur in daily life (e.g. sexual).
- Psychoanalytic therapy → symptom disappears.
- Symptom Mario = expression of repressed conflict → internal division of the subject

case Mike:

- Convinced that strange things happen, but does not know what. He is target of bullying, comments and voices.
- Feels that the world changes; with diverse effects on him
- Uses conversations to express disease; helps organising his thoughts and brings temporary relief, but incidents remain → external division of the subject : Mike versus strange phenomena from without

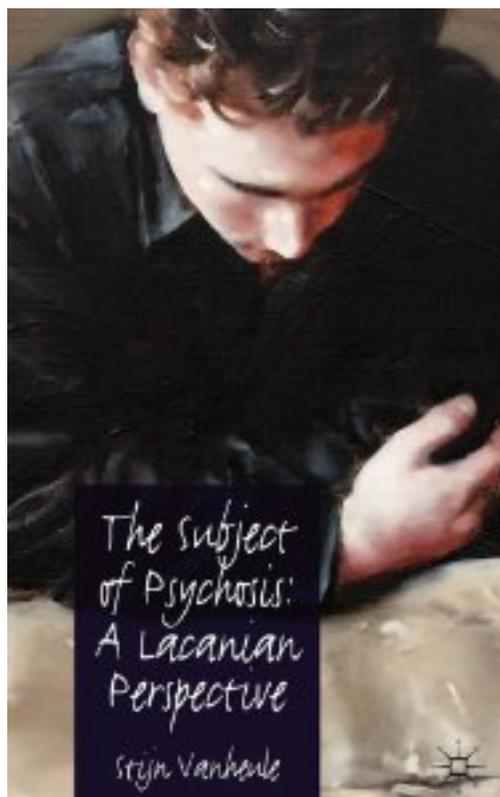
-Mario: imagined person is a *symptom*; expression of conflict concerning autonomy in relation to parents and sexuality → neurosis.

-Mike: intrusions are *elementary phenomenon*; expression of inability to discern an orderly reality → psychosis
→ Foreclosure pertaining to death / family relations

NEUROSIS	PSYCHOSIS
Symptom	Elementary phenomenon

Treatment of psychosis:

- Conversations about life; support subjective position
- Aim at identifications; development of rules of action; development of elaboration of activities



- <http://www.psychanalysis.ugent.be>
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