



# Is Mental Illness a Form of Violence Against the Self? Notes on Ego Disintegration in Schizophrenia

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## Abstract

This article seeks to provide a phenomenological inquiry into schizophrenia through which I propose to bring to the fore the *mental violence* exercised against the self in the case of a psychotic patient. My main aim is to show that a phenomenological analysis of mental illness, interpreted as a disintegration of the ego, can be very fruitful for understanding violence in general because it raises fundamental questions concerning intersubjectivity, intentionality, and self-awareness. In order to accomplish this objective, I will take as my point of departure a case study of mental illness as presented by the analyst Marguerite Sechehaye, and I will explore, first, the phenomenological implications of the disintegration of the ego, and second, the dynamics of the reconstruction of the ego. Third, I will address the question whether mental illness is a form of violence against the self, sketching an answer by interpreting the transition from the disintegration of the ego to its reconstruction as an elevation from a poor phenomenon to a saturated phenomenon. Finally, I will suggest how opening a dialogue between phenomenology and psychoanalysis can contribute to understanding the phenomenon of mental violence.

**Keywords** Mental violence · Intersubjectivity · Self-awareness · Saturated phenomenon

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate ego disintegration in the case of schizophrenia, taking Marguerite Sechehaye's idea of "symbolic realization"—a psychotherapeutic method used in the treatment of a schizophrenic girl—as a point of departure. Seen as an ego sickness or as an ego breakdown, schizophrenic thinking seems to have certain points in common with child development (Piaget), involving the same dynamics and stages of the (re)construction of the ego. What I want to

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show through a phenomenological approach is that ego disintegration represents a form of violence not only against *others* (when the psychotic becomes violent), but first and foremost against the *self*. This means that the aggressor (the schizophrenic patient) is his/her own victim, and thus we are confronted here with a reification of the human being, who becomes “deprived of sense” by entering into a realm where the sense of reality is “screened” and therefore inaccessible in its genuine form. This loss of reality derives from the patient’s inability to be the master of a stable outer world distinct from his/her inner world—where the latter world is one in which the primary object (the mother) becomes a mere extension of the patient, the one who satisfies his/her needs according to the symbiotic relationship between mother and infant. As a result of this inability to distinguish between the outer and inner world, then, the violence exercised by the psychotic patient when his/her desires are not fulfilled by the primary object returns to its point of departure: the *ego*, who now experiences a sense of unreality. In other words, this form of “mental violence” of the patient against him/herself has its source in the loss of the real.

If we take into account that a phenomenological perspective requires analyzing such basic concepts as intentionality and sense, then from a phenomenological standpoint, schizophrenia can be seen as a manner of losing reality and thereby sense. Nevertheless, the problem with this loss of sense is that it compromises intentionality, i.e., our experiential openness to the “lifeworld,” to use Husserl’s term. This insight calls upon us to reconsider not only the concept of *intentionality* with respect to a psychotic ego, but also the concept of *sense* with regard to the “lack of sense” of the psychotic ego, which is synonymous with a pathological perception of reality. For this reason, the discussion will center on the two phases described by Sechehaye: *the disintegration of the ego by the mental illness*<sup>1</sup> and *the reconstruction*

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note here our decision to use “mental illness” instead of “mental disease”. Even if, at a first glance, the two expressions seem to be interchangeable, matters are actually more nuanced. In the literature of medicine, there is a tendency to take “illness” as the lived experience of a subject, while “disease” is related to the objective body. Given this, our paper should surely use “mental illness” throughout, since we are not talking about, for example, some kind of brain lesion causing certain types of symptoms. S. K. Toombs, a central figure in the phenomenology of medicine, goes into the illness/disease distinction and traces its origin to Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, where Sartre distinguishes four levels: pre-reflective sensory experiencing (e.g., pain); the psychic object, “suffered illness,” when one reflects upon the pain; a further reflective level where one apprehends this as “disease” by adopting the perspective of the other and seeing my body as an organism; and a fourth level of the “disease state,” which is how the physician conceptually characterizes it (Toombs 1992a: 31). On a closer examination of Sartre’s distinctions, we find out that the specific contrast in English between “illness” and “disease” comes about through the Hazel Barnes translation of Sartre’s *mal/maladie* distinction. Sartre shows that illness (*mal*) is what happens when, through reflection, pain becomes a psychic object (Sartre 1956: 335ff), while disease (*maladie*) is what “illness” as suffered, through the body-of-others, becomes. D. Leder, another important figure in the phenomenology of medicine, considers that “The lived experience of illness came to be seen as ephenomenal; the real disease unfolded in the material world of *res extensa* and could best be exposed by the pathologist’s knife” (Leder 1992: 21). The same idea is highlighted by Toombs when says that the “The experience of illness means much more to the person who is ill than simply a collection of physical signs which define a particular disease” (Toombs 1992b: 127). However, P. Sundström takes a more nuanced look at the received illness/disease distinction and agrees that it makes sense but warns against absolutizing the distinction so that the patient’s focus on subjective experience refers to “illness” while physician’s focus on objective reality refers to “disease”. For more on this distinction, see Sundström (2001).

of the ego using “symbolic realization”. Regarding each of these phases, my objective will be the same and will consist in examining mental violence using Husserl’s concepts of *intentionality*, *sense*, *constitution*, and *(inter)subjectivity*. The passage from the disintegration of the ego to its reconstruction, which is synonymous with the passage from abnormality to normality, will be interpreted as an elevation from a poor phenomenon to a saturated phenomenon in Jean-Luc Marion’s sense. I thereby attempt to open the door to a much richer understanding of alterity, both in the clinical and in the phenomenological sense. I will also focus on the phenomenon of mental illness and the phenomenon of violence in order to shed some light on the interlacements that are to be found between them. This final step of my study is meant to reveal a number of meaningful insights that predetermine and thus facilitate the dialogue between phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

### **The Disintegration of the Ego: Losing Reality, Sense, and Finally, the World**

The *Autobiography of a schizophrenic girl* tells the story (as she herself recounts it briefly after her recovery) of a young girl, Renee, who was diagnosed at age seventeen with severe schizophrenia, a condition that does not usually have a favorable prognosis. After some physiological interventions that didn’t improve the mental health of the teenager in any way, Renee begins an unusual form of therapy developed by Sechehaye, her analyst, and finally recovers after 8 years. But before entering into the world of Renee, who will represent the central figure of our phenomenological analysis, we must say that we will take her retrospective personal account of her mental illness during the different periods of remission and her recovery process to be valid as a working hypothesis. And here it should be noted that in the psychiatric literature, these recollections would have lost their scientific value had they not been verified, as was indeed the case with Sechehaye, who succeeded in developing a therapeutic method by constantly verifying the manifest behavior of the patient and by discovering, step by step, the procedural errors that finally helped her to improve this therapeutic technique, known as *symbolic realization*.

The recovery process—which cannot be denied, not only according to Renee’s autobiography, but also according to a number of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts—offers us, phenomenologically speaking, the possibility of redefining the concepts of intentionality and of sense by bringing to light a *world* that literally becomes synonymous with the other in its alterity, considered in terms of what psychoanalysts call the “objectal relation”.<sup>2</sup> Our purpose is accordingly to address the problem of *mental violence*, understood as a direct consequence of the patient’s inability to reintegrate otherness into his/her own subjective structure. The inability to encounter the other, understood as not being able to receive him/her properly in one’s own experience, is therefore interpreted as violence directed against the central dimensions of

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<sup>2</sup> This concept stems from the psychoanalytic theory of instinct and states that the object of an instinct is the person through whom the instinctual desire is fulfilled.

the ego. Put differently, and related to our case, what a weak connection with the mother, the primary object, means for Renee is a weak access to herself in her integrality as a human being.

Being given that phenomenology, according to a widespread view, is defined not in terms of its subject matter, but rather in terms of its distinct method, one could ask whether this would involve using the reduction or even a form of eidetic variation in order to accomplish our phenomenological endeavor. Moreover, if we take in consideration that Renee's recollections will serve us as working hypothesis, which should be the status of the phenomenological interpretation promised in this paper? These questions put in light the need of employing a distinction between philosophical phenomenology and the use of phenomenology in a non-philosophical context, i.e., the psychoanalysis in the case of our paper. The fact that the phenomenological discourse has a non-philosophical relevance and that it has served as a powerful source for many disciplines cannot be contested. It is well known that some of the first influential applications of phenomenology were in the domain of psychopathology and experimental psychology<sup>3</sup> and it is noteworthy how rarely is to find any reference to reduction in all these applications. In this regard, the works of Amedeo Giorgi<sup>4</sup> represent ones of the most persistent references to the distinction between philosophical phenomenology and applied phenomenology. Giorgi strongly affirms in his works that the reduction is indispensable for any applied phenomenology. However, even if the reduction is essential for any non-philosophical application of phenomenology, as Giorgi claims, our paper will remain faithful to Zahavi's arguments, according to which Husserl was primarily interested in the question of how to facilitate the entry into proper philosophical thinking, and not into providing concrete tools such as reduction in order to collect data and conduct experiments (Zahavi 2019: 12). Bearing this in mind, our aim is not to import the so-called phenomenological instruments of Husserlian phenomenology, but to facilitate the entry into a phenomenological thinking of psychopathology—related to Renee's case. The psychoanalysis discourse would be, therefore, closer to the applied phenomenology than to the philosophical phenomenology. It consequently means that the concept of selfhood, which will be at the center of our discussion, will be understood from the point of view of both applied phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

<sup>3</sup> In this regard, see K. Jaspers who published an article outlining the role of Husserlian phenomenology for psychiatry (Jaspers 1912). Some years later, E. Minkowski wrote about the relevance that philosophical phenomenology has for the clinical practice (Minkowski 1970). Another relevant figure in the domain of applied psychology is D. Katz who insisted that Husserlian phenomenology was essential for psychology (Katz 1950). Katz has also argued that many insights and ideas from phenomenology could be helpful for better experiments and for better theorizing and that phenomenology could as well refine his method through the experimental techniques. This mutual help between phenomenology and psychology is not simply a question of importing and applying ready ideas from one side to another, as Zahavi claims, "but a two-way exchange, where both sides could profit from the interaction" (Zahavi 2019: 12). For more on this "two-way exchange" called also "mutual illumination" see Varela et al. (1991) but also Gallagher (1997) where it is seen as a "mutual enlightenment".

<sup>4</sup> We refer here to the works of Giorgi where he defends the thesis according to which a scientific research cannot claim phenomenological status unless it is supported by some use of reduction (Giorgi 2010: 18). See Giorgi (1994, 2010).

## A Pathological Perception of Reality, or How to Lose Reality

Let us now begin with Renee's first introspective recollections, which signal, according to Sechehaye, the first stage of the disintegration of the ego—namely, the development of a pathological perception of reality. Renee very clearly remembers her first feelings of unreality, which occurred when she was only 5 years old:

I remember very well the day it happened. We were staying in the country and I had gone for a walk alone as I did now and then. Suddenly as I was passing the school, I heard a German song; the children were having a singing lesson. I stopped to listen, and at that instant a strange feeling came over me, a feeling hard to analyze but akin to something I was to know too well later—a disturbing sense of unreality. It seemed to me that I no longer recognized the school, it had become as large as barracks; the singing children were prisoners, compelled to sing. It was as though the school and the children's song were set apart from the rest of the world. At the same time, my eye encountered a field of wheat whose limits I could not see. The song of the children imprisoned in the smooth stone school-barracks filled me with such anxiety that I broke into sobs. I ran home to our garden and began to play, "to make things seem as they usually were," that is, to return to reality. (Sechehaye 1970: 21)

This first appearance of psychotic elements, i.e., the illimitable vastness, the brilliant light, and the gloss and smoothness of material things, signals a disturbed subjectivity by virtue of which the spatiotemporal framework is redefined.<sup>5</sup> For Renee, as we can see in the paragraph quoted above, objects suddenly become enormous; they are detached, cut off, without relation to one another. The impression of immensity—as well as that of cinematography, due to the detachment of objects—progressively deepens her anxiety. What is interesting to point out in this situation, and what Sechehaye also stresses in her interpretation, is that the feeling of strangeness only occurs in circumstances related to society (on the street, at school, etc.), and it seems that "it can be regarded as the earliest sign of ego disintegration: Renee has lost synthesis and perspective" (Sechehaye 1970: 142). We can technically clarify this first stage of ego disintegration by using Husserl's theory of constitution, but not before asking whether there is a relation between the "social sectors of the ego," which in Renee's case are void of affect (Sechehaye 1970: 142), and the pathological perception of objects. Put otherwise: does an impaired intersubjectivity then alter, in its turn, the intentionality directed toward the world of objects through the act of perception? Or contrariwise, does the pathological perception of the world of objects subsequently alter intersubjectivity? How, precisely, does Renee constitute objects, and what exactly is distorted and disturbed in the structure of her constituting ego so that she sees the world in a pathological way?

It is a commonly shared opinion among phenomenologists from Husserl to Marion that the most basic experience of self depends on our ways of relating to

<sup>5</sup> See the work of Wilfried Bion for more on the topic of the experiential spatialization of mental contents, a feature that is specific to schizophrenia (Symington and Symington 1996).

the other and to the social world taken as a whole. This openness or intentionality directed toward the world thus becomes absolutely fundamental for the structure of human experience and must be analyzed in detail. Because my interpretation relies on Husserl's concept of intentionality, what I will do in the following is to sketch his philosophical framework, taking the notion of intentionality as a point of departure.

It is well known that the concept of intentionality informs Husserl's work as a whole, including both his static and his genetic phenomenology. In what follows, I will employ its structure as noetico-noematic correlation by distinguishing three different yet related components of the intentional relation between consciousness and object: namely, the *noesis*, the *noema*, and the *hyletic flow* (see Husserl 1982: 214). By *hyletic flow* Husserl understands the underlying material, the raw data of sensations, which is, in fact, another name for the non-intentive components of generic color, touch, and sound (the generic white or black, for example, if we are talking about a white or black object). However, Husserl emphasizes that our experience is not merely an experience of pure sense data—it is more complex than that. As he points out, there are two basic moments that we must take into account regarding every intentive mental process. The first moment, the noesis or noetic act, represents the process of consciousness that operates as a sense-bestowing act because it is an act through which the experiential object is formed out of the hyletic data in perceptive experience. For Husserl, then, the noesis forms or shapes the hyletic material in such a way that consciousness is *eo ipso* also consciousness of something, pointing toward something of which it is conscious. Nevertheless, intentionality signifies not only the intentive mental process we have just described, but also what is being intended—the intentional correlate, called the noematic content or noema. The noetic acts that animate the hyletic flow of sense data are thus inherent components of the noetic mental process; its intentional correlate, the noema, is given to consciousness and transcendently constituted, endowed with a particular significance by the noetic act.

How can we analyze Renee's case in these Husserlian terms? At Renee's level of disintegration, as described in her own words in the quotation above, we are dealing with a noetic act, a sense-bestowing act, that seen from the outside, from the point of view of normal people who share a common world, seems to be disturbed. The fact that we normally perceive things in the same way indicates that consciousness is actually consciousness of something that is given *according to* a perceptual system of normality. For example, if we do not see the school as a school in its real proportions but as Renee sees it—namely, as an immense barracks—this happens because we do not share the same perceptual system of normality. And this means that the constitutive act, the noesis, fails to constitute the noema properly, thereby modifying the experience of the ego involved in this process of constitution.<sup>6</sup> Strikingly, this is

<sup>6</sup> However, we do not take this example as a hallucination, because at the current level of Renee's disintegration, we are not dealing with a simple perception that occurs in the absence of an external stimulation, as hallucination is usually defined in the clinical and scientific literature. At this moment, Renee is struggling with a modified perception of reality that has its roots in the real. She does not see an object that is absent (and therefore not to be found in the experience of the common world), but an object that is not taken as such, neither experienced in its inter-individual relationships nor endowed with a utilitarian function. In contrast, the experience of a visual hallucination of a barracks would be phenomenologically indistinguishable from an experience of actually seeing a real barracks, because what matters here

what Husserl emphasizes when discussing egoic synthesis in his Second Cartesian Meditation:

The “object” of consciousness, the object as having identity “with itself” during the flowing subjective process, does not come into the process from outside; on the contrary, it is included as a sense in the subjective process itself—and thus as an “*intentional effect*” produced by the synthesis of consciousness. (Husserl 1960: 42)

The fact that the school is given in Renee’s experience as an immense barracks, detached from the entire landscape, is a modification that occurs in the ego’s constitutive function, disabling a proper relation between her inner world and the outer world and thereby announcing the loss of her ego’s ability to perform an appropriate constitutive synthesis. As a result, the lack of “sense” she is subjected to through her abnormal perception of the world progressively leads her to the loss of the real. Since it is unable to constitute objects as they are given in a perceptual system of normality, the ego finds it impossible to experience reality. In even more drastic terms: the loss of sense entails the loss of the real, and thus the experience of unreality. This is exactly what Sechahaye outlines when discussing defense mechanisms of the psychotic ego and affirming the following:

This imbalance between assimilation in the ego itself and accommodation to reality augments constantly, Renee no longer retains awareness of her subjectivity. Lacking this capacity for clear awareness of her inner impressions, she projects them on the outside world. (Sechahaye 1970: 144)

This idea of self-awareness gives us a very fertile phenomenological basis for grasping the tension between the outer and inner world and the dynamics that in the case of the psychotic ego lead to the confusion between them. Self-awareness, in other words, presupposes an initial passivity of the ego (which normally characterizes each individual), which then gives way to an active appreciation of the ego’s engagement with the external world.

### **Self-awareness and the Lived World of the Schizophrenic Patient: Losing the World**

Becoming aware of our mental life represents one of the most peculiar of human acts—and at the same time, one of the most controversial facts—because it implies a kind of division of consciousness that is not easy to understand (See Depraz et al. 2003: 11). The difficulty with this controversial self-awareness is that it requires an observation of the self by the self in the very moment in which the self is affected,<sup>7</sup> thus catching the self in the act, so to speak, in its relation with the outer world.

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Footnote 6 (continued)

is possibility and not actuality. For a more detailed analysis of hallucinations from a phenomenological perspective, see Ratcliffe (2017).

<sup>7</sup> For a broader view of this topic, see Depraz (1998: 83).



Being able to perceive one's self "at work" is possible only because our subjectivity is not given as such, but on the contrary, is doubled by a form of pre-reflexivity. How exactly do we enter into this pre-reflective zone and how do we manage to make it conscious? And what happens when we are dealing with an ego unable to access it, as is the case with the psychotic ego who no longer retains any "awareness of its subjectivity"?

Seen in light of the model of reflection, the problem of self-awareness is that it is usually taken as a relation between two relata. This is to say that being aware implies a sort of self-division, understood as a separation between the reflecting and the reflected-upon. Moreover, being aware of a perception, for example, requires not only thematizing the experience of perception, making it into an object, but also grasping it as being identical with the thematizing experience (see Zahavi 1998a). Although at first glance it seems to be valid in these points, the reflection model encounters difficulties, and as Zahavi emphasizes, what remains unclear is "how can the act of reflection [...] be in position to realize that the act of perception belongs to the same subjectivity as itself" (Zahavi 1998a: 22).

A solution to this difficulty would involve employing the distinction Husserl uses in the *Logical investigations* (Husserl 1970): namely, the distinction between *perceiving* (*Wahrnehmen*) and *experiencing* (*Erleben*). According to this distinction, whenever I'm aware of something, I am initially perceiving the intentional object, yet at the same time I am experiencing the intentional act as well. As Zahavi says regarding this problem, "[a]lthough I am not intentionally directed at the act (this only happens in the subsequent reflection, where the act is thematized), it is not unconscious but conscious, that is pre-reflectively self-awareness" (Zahavi 1998b: 207).

However, what is still debatable in current research<sup>8</sup> when speaking of self-awareness is the ontological and phenomenological status of the self. The question that has raised several concerns on this topic is whether or not self-awareness necessarily implies speaking of a self. To put it another way, is there always a subject or a self involved in self-awareness? Or are we dealing with different types of self-awareness that are essentially "selfless" or "subjectless"? An answer to these questions should help us to recreate the experiential dimension of Renee's experience and thereby to investigate the constitution of the demarcation between self and non-self (and thus the question of the unity and identity of the self) in more detail. It is of course crucial for a phenomenological inquiry to take the first-person perspective very seriously and to investigate "what it feels like," because only in this manner can one understand the experience of depersonalization and the feeling of strangeness as they were experienced by Renee. Ideally, this would require offering an account of the distinction between the egological and the non-egological theory of consciousness as thematized by Gurwitsch. However, in what follows, I will not attempt to elucidate this issue, but will simply emphasize Zahavi's thesis concerning selfhood, which is indispensable for illuminating the case study addressed in this

<sup>8</sup> In this regard, see the works of Strawson (2000) and Gurwitsch (1941).



paper. Following Zahavi's insights, I will show that it is not only possible, but necessary to operate with a basic notion of self.

Let me begin by offering a short definition of what is called a non-egological theory or a no-ownership view (Strawson 1959: 95). According to a non-egological theory,<sup>9</sup> experiences are simply mental events that occur without having any subject assigned to them. Therefore, as Zahavi claims, they "must be understood as the anonymous acquaintance which consciousness has of itself, and not as an awareness of an experience-self" (Zahavi 2000: 56). Henrich and Pothast (see Pothast 1971) defend this non-egological position by considering that it is difficult to understand why the ego's awareness of experience counts as a case of self-awareness. For them, the ego's awareness of experience and self-awareness are not identical, which is exactly the difficulty of the reflection theory sketched above. However, the fact that the contribution of an ego is unnecessary is criticized by Zahavi from several angles (although given the specific purpose of this discussion, I will not refer to all points of his egological reply). Making use of Husserlian reflections, Zahavi argues that a non-egological theory can't say anything meaningful when it comes to providing a phenomenological analysis of subjectivity. The question to which the non-egological position does not have a proper answer is the following: what permits me to distinguish between my own experience and the other's experience? If in the case of a physical object it can be claimed that it exists whether or not it appears for a subject, this is not the same for an experience. A perceptual experience, for instance, is always an experience given directly to me. Or as Zahavi puts it, "experiences are essentially characterized by having a subjective 'feel' to them" (Zahavi 2000: 60). If I and a friend are looking at the same table, these two perceptions of the table are indeed anonymous on the pre-reflective level. There is no explicit thematization and no explicit awareness of this perceptual experience as being mine. But on closer examination, we can see that only one of the two perceptions is given in a firsthand mode of presentation. In this regard, Zahavi's conclusion is that experiences are characterized by a basic level of ipseity, which also means a basic form of egocentricity. Without this elementary egocentricity at the pre-reflective level, it would be impossible to distinguish between my own experience and the others's experience.

Returning to the case of Renee, it now becomes clear why the loss of sense and the impaired intentionality already discussed make the ego unable to be conscious of its acts—finding itself, finally, incapable of accessing the pre-reflective zone. According to Parnas, the most basic self-awareness is the intentional act's awareness of itself (Parnas 2000: 119). The subject of experience is implicitly and pre-reflectively present in the field of awareness. This is possible only because this elementary self-awareness is not the product of any reflection or introspection, which means that is not, in fact, a relation, but "a direct self-manifestation of experience" (Parnas 2000: 120). Applied to Renee's case, we are confronted with a distorted self-manifestation of experience at the pre-reflective level. As we could see above, without

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<sup>9</sup> Sartre's position is another example of a non-egological theory, for he claims that the ego is neither necessary, nor possible, nor actual. For more on Zahavi's critique of Sartre's thesis, see Zahavi (2000, 2005, 2015, 2018).

an elementary egocentricity it becomes impossible for one to distinguish between his/her own experience and the other's experience. The principal consequence is that the suppression of any form of egocentricity entails the suppression of self-awareness and the impossibility of the ego to remain the subjective pole of its acts. This would explain precisely why Renee's inner components—components such as suffering, fear, or aggression—are attributed from now on to inanimate objects and physical movements. Renee no longer localizes her inner impressions in consciousness, and the scenes that take place around her are not distinct from her inner world. For example, she hears her own anxiety and her suffering in the sigh of the wind:

On windy days in bad weather I was horribly upset. At night I could not sleep, listening to the wind, sharing its howls, its complaints and despairing cries, and my soul wept and groaned with it. More and more I imagined the wind bore a message for me to divine. (Sechehaye 1970: 32)

The similarities between this kind of thinking and what Jean Piaget called the animistic period of child development (1999: 207–253; see also Piaget 1927) are too obvious for Sechehaye to ignore. In fact, the way Renee literally perceives things reveals one of the mechanisms of symbolic thinking that is not only characteristic for schizophrenic regression, but is also evident in the thinking of a small child. To formulate this difficulty in Piaget's terms, the question here is how interior impressions can be projected onto inert objects and physical movements, and how, precisely, this projection forms "schemas of assimilation that distort the external data" (Piaget 1999: 253). Like the child, the schizophrenic patient is living "in a world that was subjectivized in some sense of the word" (Sass 1987: 21). However, even if up until now the disintegration of the ego can be read in light of Piaget's theories, this does not mean that the schizophrenic mentality can be reduced to that of a child. It nevertheless does open a path for us to reconsider the disintegrative process of the ego and to understand, as Sechehaye emphasizes, that "what seems to be a disintegrative process can, under certain conditions, become a reconstructive one" (Sechehaye 1970: 186). Given this precaution, then, in order properly to understand the structure of the schizophrenic world, we must note that "subjective projections not recognized as such by the infant transform the external world into a magical universe largely or completely devoid of any sense of subjectivity" (Sass 1987: 21). The fact of localizing her inner activity in things is followed by a dissociation that is felt as a painful aura of comedy. Henceforth she regards herself not as a person, but as a personage to be addressed in the third person as one does to a 1- or 2-year-old child. Now it is characteristic for the schizophrenic world to be permeated by a feeling of being watched. It seems clear enough that in the schizophrenic's lived world, we are confronted with a particular kind of *self-consciousness* in which one takes oneself as an *object*, thus transforming inner processes into external things. This also means that the schizophrenic patient is somehow self-conscious of his/her own consciousness, because the feeling of being watched "typically involves a sense of the presence of other consciousness" (see Sass 1987: 21), something that is totally lacking in any conception of child experience. However, what Sechehaye takes from the examination of schizophrenic thinking in light of Piaget's theory is the formation of the symbol, which will later help her to develop the method of symbolic realization.

Because she will make fruitful use of Piaget's thought, in the following we will take a brief look not only at his account of the development of the symbol in the infant, but also at the Freudian roots of this account, which will subsequently serve as a framework for understanding *mental violence* in the context of the reconstruction of the ego.

### The Development of the Symbol in Child Thinking and in Schizophrenic Thinking

Analyzing symbolic play in infants, Piaget draws a distinction between symbolic thought and rational thought, whose instrument is the sign. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the sign is defined as an arbitrary signifier that is related to its signified through social convention and not by a resemblance between them.<sup>10</sup> For example, words, verbal indications, or mathematical symbols would be signs. In contrast to individual experience, the system of signs has a social connotation and is therefore liable to generalization and abstraction, making the development of rational thought possible. In contrast, the symbol represents a "motivated" signifier because there is a resemblance between it and the signified. Metaphor is the classical example of the idea of a symbol, because it is one of the clearest ways to show the relationship between the image used and the object to which it refers—a relationship that does not depend on a social convention; instead, it is directly experienced by the mind of each individual. For Piaget, the symbol is used in "affective language" in order to express concrete experience, while the sign belongs to intellectual language because it expresses impersonal thoughts. What is interesting to note in this case is that different psychoanalytic schools have used the same definition of the word "symbol" by understanding it as an image that has a meaning that differs from its immediate content, thus *lacking* a direct resemblance between signifier and signified. However, for Freud the symbol seems to be essentially unconscious, and therefore does not have a clear meaning for the subject.<sup>11</sup> Thus the unconscious symbol would be a form of thought opposed to socialized thought, since it is to be found only in dreams and daydreams.<sup>12</sup> Starting from these observations, which are confirmed by clinical

<sup>10</sup> See Saussure (2011: 78): "The linguistic sign is arbitrary; language, as defined, would therefore seem to be a system which, because it depends solely on a rational principle, is free and can be organized at will. Its social nature, considered independently, does not definitely rule out this viewpoint. Doubtless it is not on a purely logical basis that group psychology operates; one must consider everything that deflects reason in actual contacts between individuals. But the thing that keeps language from being a simple convention that can be modified at the whim of interested parties is not its social nature; it is rather the action of time combined with the social force. If time is left out, the linguistic facts are incomplete and no conclusion is possible".

<sup>11</sup> To outline a complete theory of the symbol in Freud's writings is a task that remains to be done. For more on this topic, see Petocz (1999).

<sup>12</sup> Freud (1936: 15): "Tous les modes de langage propres à traduire les formes les plus subtiles de la pensée: conjonctions, prépositions, changements de déclinaison et de conjugaison, tout cela est abandonné, faute de moyens d'expression, seuls les matériaux bruts de la pensée peuvent encore s'exprimer comme dans une langue primitive, sans grammaire. L'abstrait est ramené à sa base concrète. Ce qui reste ainsi peut facilement sembler incohérent. Quand un grand nombre d'objets, de processus, sont représentés par des symboles devenus étrangers à la pensée consciente, ce fait est attribuable autant à une régression archaïque dans l'appareil psychique qu'aux exigences de la censure".

practice, Piaget concludes that “the whole thought of the child, being syncretic and prelogical, offers analogies with unconscious symbolic thought and even appears to be intermediate between it and rational thought” (Piaget 1999: 170).

If we now return to the case of Renee, we can easily figure out, in light of Piaget’s ideas, that the disintegration of the ego happened somewhere at the pre-logical level. The only language Renee could understand at this stage of disintegration was affective language, engaged through symbols, and not the rational language that is involved in verbal signs. In her paper dedicated to Renee’s case of schizophrenia, “La réalisation symbolique” (also known as the work where her method of symbolic realization was systematized), Sechehaye insists several times that symbolic realization does not have a rational basis, but an affective one (Sechehaye 1947: 55). From the very beginning of this paper, we see what led Sechehaye to the idea of symbolic realization in the particular case of Renee and why the symbol played such an important role in her story. The analyst observed—and it must be said that this represents a commonly shared opinion concerning psychotics—that Renee did not manage to understand her own pathological thinking when Sechehaye was trying to explain it to her in rational terms. The next step was therefore to find a common language meant to help the patient to *re-enter into reality*, to *re-integrate reality* in the subjective structure of her ego. But does this not mean, after all, regaining access, first, to the otherness she has lost due to her childhood traumas (which involved an impaired manner of relating to others)? Would not this condition require, second, solving—according to Sechehaye’s point of view—the complication of the drives and the dynamics that shaped the relation with the primary object, which, in a nutshell, is just an occurrence of the relation with otherness in its absolute alterity? And last but not least, do not all these consequences imply referring to *mental violence* as a zero-point where the disintegration and the reconstruction of the Ego intersect?

## The Reconstruction of the Ego: Regaining the World in Its Integrality

### (Dis)integration of the Ego into Reality

Before discussing the dynamics of the symbolic realization through which the analyst cures Renee, one must pay attention to the form that the ego’s reconstruction takes. In other words, *disintegration* has to be understood from what would be its opposite, namely, *integration*. Again, we have to mention that this aspect is related to Piaget’s theory of child development.

Following contemporary psychoanalytic premises, a process of disintegration typically occurs when something is not genuinely integrated into the ego’s maturational process. This is what Winnicott claims in *The maturational processes and the facilitating environmental processes*, which will help us further demonstrate that the idea of reconstruction employed here is linked to the dyad integration-disintegration. According to Winnicott,

[t]he term disintegration is used to describe a sophisticated defence, a defence that is an active production of chaos in defence against unintegration in the

absence of maternal ego-support, that is, against the unthinkable or archaic anxiety that results from failure of holding in the stage of absolute dependence. (Winnicott 1965: 61)

On the contrary, in the very next paragraph we find out that

[i]ntegration is closely linked with the environmental function of holding. The achievement of integration is the unit. First comes “I” which includes “everything else is not me”. Then comes “I am, I exist, I gather experiences and enrich myself and have an introjective and projective interaction with the NOT-ME, the actual world of shared reality”. Add to this: “I am seen or understood to exist by someone,” and, further, add to this: “I get back (as a face seen in a mirror) the evidence I need that I have been recognized as a being”. (Winnicott 1965: 61)

Taking into consideration the level of regression that had led the ego beyond the oral to the fetal stage in Renee’s case, it becomes clear that its reconstruction would require a progressive integration of the unity in virtue of which Renee should be able to distinguish between “me” and “not-me”—the world of shared reality. It is obvious that at the fetal stage to which Renee had slipped, there was no question of an autonomous ego (see Secheyay 1970: 158), because the ego no longer even existed as a conscious entity. This explains why it could happen that once Renee was incapable of distinguishing between ego and non-ego, she was no longer able to recognize the analyst.

Because of her successive traumas in her first years of childhood, Renee could not solve the conflict characteristic of that specific stage of development, so that the ego was abandoned to self-destruction. Freud has shown that whenever the libidinal drives are frustrated, “the drives of self-preservation lose their defensive energy” (see Secheyay 1970: 149)<sup>13</sup> This complication accordingly pushed Renee into a state of confusion, disintegration, and agitation, since the necessity of returning to the mother was not yet dissociated from self-destructive impulses (Secheyay 1970: 18). Briefly put, the process of disintegration would be the result of an eruption of the unconscious into the realm of the conscious. The repressed material, which belongs to the unconscious, thus overwhelms the capacities of the ego, who—weakened due to the lack of defense mechanisms—recognizes the unacceptable components of the unconscious and therefore projects them outward. Phenomenologically speaking, this sort of violence<sup>14</sup> has its point of departure in an impaired integration of otherness into the ego’s structure.

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as Secheyay insists in this regard, “Renee could not love herself since the primary object had refused to nourish, hence love her. When the ego is no longer charged with libidinal energy produced by the introjections of maternal love, destructive forces soon invade it”.

<sup>14</sup> This is a form of violence that reminds us of what Bergeret (1995) has termed “fundamental violence”. Bergeret defines “fundamental violence” as a vital force, claiming that violence is neither good nor bad. It follows that everything depends on the way this violence is used in the succession of crises specific to affective development.

This insight should not be surprising, since it is present in Sechehaye's clinical observations<sup>15</sup>—for example, when she notes, concerning Renee's inability to recognize her as analyst, that “the impression of loss of reality lies in the reluctance to accept the mother as a social autonomous being” (Sechehaye 1970: 144). Here what one must understand by the notion of the “social” mother is the actual world of shared reality taken as a whole—the world in its integrality. But one cannot grasp the sense of alterity without having it embedded in one's own subjective structure. In his Fifth Cartesian Meditation, Husserl strongly affirms this idea, emphasizing that there belongs within our psychic life the entire constitution of the world existing for us, and consequently, “the differentiation of that constitution into the systems that constitute what is included in my peculiar ownness and the systems that constitute what is other” (Husserl 1960: 98f.). Later on in the same text, Husserl conceives the other “as an analogue of something included in my peculiar ownness” (Husserl 1960: 115). The other occurs in my existence as an “intentional modification of my primordial ‘world,’” thus as being a “‘modification’ of myself” (Husserl 1960: 115). The fact of failing to accept the world or the social mother (which in Husserl's terms means not being able to constitute it properly) entails the impossibility of constituting not only this ownness, but otherness as included in this ownness. For this reason, Renee breaks with reality—a reality that in fact plays the role of the *social mother*. The violence exercised by this break seems at first glance to be the “fundamental violence” that structures the central dimensions of consciousness, being at the same time the level that must be transcended in order to permit a genuine development of the self. One may then ask under which conditions this form of violence, understood as a step in the constitution of the normal ego, can be used in order to solve the inherent conflict that led to the construction of a psychotic ego. How could the process of integration into reality through symbolic realization be possible by reaffirming this form of violence?

Because for Renee the objects were invested with her inner impressions, and thus with her own aggression, her integration into reality would seem to consist in the re-direction of this violence toward her own ego. Violence seems to play, at this level, the role of an important element to work with, representing one of the dynamics that led to the development of symbolic realization.

### **Symbolic Realization: Dynamics and Phenomenological Implications**

One of the first symbolic realizations accomplished by the analyst was discovered while Renee was suffering from severe physical pain, necessitating frequent morphine injections. One day after the injection had been administered, Sechehaye drew

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<sup>15</sup> See in this regard the work of *Equipe rapide d'intervention de crise* (ERIC) with adolescents. This is a mobile emergency service in Paris meant to help patients facing breakdowns, and it operates on the assumption that it is more helpful for the patient not to be hospitalized, but to be kept and treated at home. The working hypothesis of the ERIC team is thus that the patient should not be isolated from his/her family because the solution is to restore the functional hierarchies of the family, in their relation with the adolescent, through a new parental attitude. For more on this subject, see Depraz and Mauriac (2008).

the curtains, throwing the room into a green shadow, while waiting for the drug to take effect. Later, when Renee was again in pain (and was still unable to understand that the source of her satisfaction was the morphine injection), she cried, saying: “The green, the green has gone” (Sechehaye 1970: 158). But once her need had been satisfied not only by administering her morphine injection but also by restoring “the green,” Renee was forced to recognize the mother-analyst as the source of her satisfaction, thereby creating an elementary bond between her and the outside world, between her and the other. The symbol “green sea,” representing a primal need of the ego, was “realized” in order to offer the psychotic ego a comprehensible substitute for reality. Because signs are rational by nature and because Renee had regressed to a pre-logical stage, symbolism was the only way to restore contact with her. “Realizing” unconscious desires according to symbolism provided by the psychotic girl thus progressively led her to regain reality and the world in its integrality. This became possible through the nine symbolic realizations that Sechehaye accomplished in her therapy, closely following Freud’s theory of psychosexual development as well as Piaget’s theory regarding the formation of symbols in infants. Without detailing each symbolic realization, since the dynamic of each of them is the same as that of the first one formulated, we can emphasize *two phenomenological implications*. On the one hand, we should put the emphasis on the affective basis of this method, prior to any rational thinking or any rational way to communicate. On the other hand, we should highlight the contribution of what we called “mental violence” and what turned out to be a form of “fundamental violence,” which means recognizing the idea of violence as such as being at the core of our development (be it from a clinical point of view or from an existential point of view).

Nevertheless, what we have to keep in mind at this point of our analysis is that one’s integration into reality, which is synonymous with a normal perception of reality, depends on experiencing a genuine contact with the other from the very beginning of one’s life. One cannot become oneself without establishing a proper relation with the closest “other” (the primary object, in Freud’s terms), and this has consequences not only on the phenomenological level, but also on the clinical level—these two levels being linked in a way.<sup>16</sup> Essentially, the phenomenon of violence is regarded as being “relational” in its fundamental structure because it becomes possible only in the context of intersubjectivity, even if this is a *private, impaired* intersubjectivity (see Ciocan 2019). This is also the case in solitary confinement and physical torture, which are very often compared with the experience of mental

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<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that this also represents a method used nowadays by many French psychiatrists in their relations with patients. The patient is no longer regarded as a *vulnerable sub-ject* who has to face a *powerful subject* (the psychiatrist), but instead as an equal member of the relationship. In this respect, Henri Grivois’s works, such as *Parler avec les fous* and *Urgence folie* (see Grivois 1998, 2007), reveal meaningful insights regarding the relation between pathology and normality, considering that the psychiatrist must enter into the world of the psychotic individual (thus becoming mad for a while) in order to understand the dynamics of the patient’s inner world better. By so doing, Grivois opens the door to a redefined conception of pathology—namely, by integrating it in the field of normality. There is no question of normality versus abnormality, but of abnormality *within* normality. In this respect, regarding the “paradoxical play” between multiple types of normalities, see Ciocan (2017) and Depraz and Mauriac (2009).



troubles because both can be conceived as a *violation of the intersubjective structure of experience* (see Breyer 2016). As Lisa Guenther emphasizes, in a Husserlian approach, “the personal ego is essentially constituted in relation to a world and to other egos” (Guenther 2013: 28). This means that I encounter others within the world, yet at the same time, the alter ego, the other, is not just an object within the world, but has his/her own perspective on the world. The world in its integrality doesn’t appear only to me, but also “coappears to others from their own singular perspectives” (Guenther 2013: 32). I am accordingly able to experience the world as an objective world that exceeds my experience of it. Thus the experience of other subjects oriented toward a common world is fundamental for the constitution of objective reality. According to Guenther, at the most concrete level of experience, the world is essentially an intersubjective world—the fully concrete intersubjective world with its specific history and culture, or simply put, the “real world” of concrete experience. At this level of the personal ego, “the first concrete person is not myself but the other” (Guenther 2013: 33). In solitary confinement (see also Guenther 2011), the ego is deprived of contact with the other by the structure of the concrete experience itself, and is therefore unable to adhere to and to constitute an objective reality. In fact, the lack of contact with the other even leads to hallucinations and depersonalization. The intersubjective basis for a concrete experience of the world is structurally undermined by such deprivation of a community of real persons—which is to say that this form of deprivation threatens the very capacity to make and sustain meaning, and consequently “attacks the structure of intentional consciousness by impoverishing the world to which consciousness is essentially and irrevocably correlated”<sup>17</sup> (Guenther 2013: 35).

Here it must be said that it is precisely this inseparability from any intersubjective context that makes mental illness a form of violence directed toward the self. A certain form of violence is therefore possible only because ego disintegration is and remains a matter of inter-relationality, even in the most advanced stages of mental illness. It is precisely the psychotic’s urgent need for any form of relationality (which is what motivated Sechehaye to proceed via symbolism in order to establish contact with Renee) that attests to the strong dimension of relationality within mental illness, so that with the lack of such relationality, the ego is violated in its intersubjective structures of experience. Similarly, the same need for true inter-relationality is implicitly required in any case of the phenomenon of violence, because violence is eidetically possible only where the sense of alterity is impaired. Therefore the *phenomenon of violence* and the *phenomenon of mental illness* would have as a common denominator a certain disposition or inclination toward the destruction of inter-relationality, which leads, as we tried to show in the first part of the present essay, to the loss of sense, reality, and world.

Nevertheless, one may argue that violence is present in both the *disintegration* and the *reconstruction* of the ego, and that this is possible only because from a

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<sup>17</sup> Through these ideas, Lisa Guenther attacks the Husserlian insistence on the absolute primacy of the singular transcendental ego by showing that to exist as a concrete person requires embodied relations with others.

phenomenological perspective, we are dealing with the same phenomenon, given in experience in each case. But the neutrality provided by such a phenomenological interpretation of violence (an interpretation that can very easily be contested by virtue of its lack of a value-based ethics) could be redefined and adopted as such in light of our examination. If mental violence<sup>18</sup> is to be regarded as violence against the most fundamental structures of the ego—the ones regarding openness toward the other—this would allow us to reconsider its positive dimension, a dimension that in the case of Renee pre-determined the reconstruction of the ego. Taking into account that the mode of givenness of this violence seems at first glance to be the same in both cases (disintegration and reconstruction), it becomes necessary to analyze it in detail by focusing on the differences that are to be found between its negative dimension (disintegration) and its positive dimension (reconstruction), both being different sides of the same coin.<sup>19</sup>

### Normality and Abnormality: From Saturated Phenomenon to Poor Phenomenon

Now we can return to the question that opened this article. The question whether mental illness is a form of violence against the self should be reformulated according to the observations traced out up until now in order to illuminate its essential structures. The right question would be whether the abnormality (the disintegration of the ego) could offer us a richer account of *mental violence*, or whether, on the contrary, we should question the problem of violence as it is visible on the ego's route to normality (within the process of reconstruction). If abnormality is the phenomenon through which the ego is deprived of *reality*, *sense*, and *world*—as we attempted to show in the first part of this article—then we can see it as an objectification of the human being, thereby forbidding any form of subjectivity. Referring to the case of the psychotic patient, to be abnormal would first of all mean not being able to constitute a world properly, and consequently not being able to relate with others. If this is clear enough through the Husserlian analysis of the disintegration of the ego, what still remains unclear is the phenomenological status of the disintegrated ego. Does this mean that it is objectified, because it is incapable of

<sup>18</sup> Of course, by mental violence we do not understand only the mental illness as it was presented in the specific case of Renee. We should mention also the cases of violence to one's self image, body-images, one's reputation etc. which are, in a sense, forms of mental violence and which do not alter the fundamental structures of the ego. In these latter cases, we are not confronted with an impaired intersubjective basis rooted in a process of disintegration. The violence to one's reputation or to one's self image affects, indeed, the capacity of the ego to make and sustain meaning of the world we live in. But this affected capacity of sustain meaning is not the result of a process of disintegration of the ego as in the case of schizophrenia. However, without ignoring these forms of mental violences, we will refer to mental illness in this paper as a form of mental violence *par excellence*.

<sup>19</sup> See the discussion about violence and non-violence in Dodd (2017: 66–93), where he outlines the “instability” of the phenomenon of violence, which is never in a stable relationship with its means and therefore requires a closer inspection of its negative side—non-violence, always shadowed by the potential for violence.

self-awareness and consequently incapable of seeing itself as a subject? Is the progressive self-awareness of the psychotic ego that is acquired through symbolic realization a passage from a subject unable to constitute to a powerful subject who now not only constitutes, but is also constituted by virtue of its recovering?

Regarding this point, I would ask whether Jean-Luc Marion's account of saturated phenomena could be helpful here as a guide to elucidate the problem of normality and abnormality. Even though this approach could seem unusual, given that the French philosopher is not concerned with this problem, we would suggest that a connection between saturated phenomena and normality can indeed be articulated taking Marion's phenomenology of givenness as a starting point. Although the saturated phenomena is presented as an exception to phenomenality in general (Marion 2002: 226), Marion's main thesis is that on the contrary, everyday phenomena should be regarded as an exception, precisely because they present a *distorted* phenomenality. In this way Marion wants to show "that saturated phenomena give a crucial insight into phenomenality in general" (Mackinlay 2009: 58). Briefly, what Marion emphasizes is that his entire project aims to think the common-law phenomenon and the poor phenomenon "on the basis of the paradigm of the saturated phenomenon" (Marion 2002: 227). The former two kinds of phenomena would represent weakened variants of the saturated phenomenon. From this point of view, one may argue that the poor phenomenon—always reduced to something other than itself because it depends on a transcendental ego—exercises a form of violence against phenomenality in general.<sup>20</sup> This happens because it is precisely the phenomenality of the poor phenomena that has been taken in most cases as a paradigm for phenomena in general. In contrast, the saturated phenomenon does not depend on a subject and on a phenomenal horizon, since it is "given not by consciousness but to consciousness in an excess of intuition" (Tin 2010: 860). It is only from such a ground that the concept of counter-intentionality accounts for a true intersubjectivity in the absence of which any violence could be installed. And this idea is highlighted by Marion from the very beginning of his magnum opus, *Being given*, where he dwells on the fact that no intersubjectivity could exist without counter-intentionality (Marion 2002: 74). This idea can also be interpreted in the sense that "no intersubjectivity could exist without saturated phenomena," or at least without the possibility of encountering such phenomena.

Insofar as it allows us to share a common world, a common perceptual system, normality itself can be regarded as a saturated phenomenon. The principal reason is that normality does not depend on something other than itself, as is the case with poor phenomena. This implies that normality is *given to us*, but only under the conditions of an original openness toward otherness, included as such in our subjective structure. Here we are not invoking the idea of a social convention that would have to decide what is normal and what is not. Instead, what is at stake is simply the manner in which normality is given in our experience every single day—namely, by

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<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, we are right to state that "the person is a non-self" (see Depraz and Mauriac 2009), and consequently that whenever a person is reduced to *him/her-self*, *s/he* is violated in his/her experiential dimension. On this subject, see also Zeltner et al. (2006).

reinforcing our ego (and we just saw the opposite in the case of a psychotic ego) and consequently our intersubjectivity.

Abnormality would thus be a pathological modification of normality in the same way in which a poor phenomenon represents a weakened variant of a saturated phenomenon. This is to say that *normality* as saturated phenomena is the *norm*. The abnormality could therefore be regarded as a primitive or weakened phenomenon constituted by a psychotic ego. There is no question of self-awareness in this register. Abnormality is accordingly a phenomenon that only appears when the ego is confronted with the inability to be open to the world, thereby winding up in a privative intersubjectivity. It is obvious how these points become valid when considering our examination of the psychotic ego in light of Sechehaye's psychoanalytic discourse—a discourse that we hope has been broadened and clarified through our approach.

### **Conclusion: Mental Violence Between Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis**

We now come to the final point concerning *mental violence*, its neutrality, and the place it occupies between the phenomenological and the psychoanalytic discourses. The contributions found in the psychoanalytic literature are mostly concerned with self-experience in schizophrenia. The interpretations according to which, in the case of mental illness, we are dealing with a self that is poorly integrated, marked by the inability to relate, are phenomenological in their core structure. Nevertheless, the field of psychoanalysis has tended to focus on the development of models rather than on phenomenological descriptions of psychosis.<sup>21</sup> In this context, I would strongly suggest, as I did several times in the course of my analysis, that a proper understanding of *mental violence* and a fruitful use of it in clinical therapy is to be achieved from a *phenomenological* point of view and not solely from a *hermeneutical* one, which would be inefficient given that the psychotic doesn't have access to symbols considered as essentially unconscious. Even if psychoanalysis has often been regarded as a hermeneutic of the subject, its insights—as revisited and redefined by Sechehaye in her therapeutic method—have been backed up by a phenomenological account. The analyst as hermeneut must first capture those micro-phenomena that appear within the phenomenal horizon of the patient, and only afterward interpret them. Therefore the task of engaging the phenomenological method in the field of psychoanalytic therapy is urgent, particularly since we find the problem of violence at its heart.

From the point of view of its mode of givenness, *mental violence* would be a form of “structural violence” because it does not have a direct and bodily impact (see

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<sup>21</sup> This should not be surprising given the literature concerned with the phenomenological analysis of psychosis. In this respect, see not only the works of Minkowski (2002) and Tatossian (2011), but also recent analyses by Nixon et al. (2010) and by Brice and Piot (2011).

Galtung 1969)<sup>22</sup> and because it remains, after all, the result of an intentional activity, even if what is at stake is an altered intentionality. But to claim, as Galtung does, that the actual definition of violence is to be found on the consequence side<sup>23</sup> is to locate violence on the side of the object, thereby neglecting subjectivity. However, this imbalance between the objective side and the subjective side is not very helpful when it comes to tackling the problem of *mental* violence. In other words, recognizing the sources of ego disintegration and retracing the steps back to a normal mental state through a progressive reconstruction of the ego is not sufficient to grasp this ambiguous form of violence, namely, *mental violence*. The emphasis put by Sechehaye on the subjective side (which is at the very core of all hermeneutic theory) has opened the path to what are nowadays called “micro-phenomena,”<sup>24</sup> which enlarge the field of phenomenology and bring to light new lived experiences of the subject as these experiences are inwardly felt. Moreover, when taking this approach as a point of departure, it became possible to unfold the problem of intersubjectivity and implicitly that of relation, displaying the dynamics through which the other and its otherness is constitutive of one’s self.

Now if we refer to violence as a structural component of ego constitution, it could be called *mental violence* with good reason, given that is directed toward the ego’s structures—structures that are “in progress”. It follows that within the process of child development, as we can see in light of Piaget’s theory, violence doesn’t need to be defined with respect to an axiological system. It can certainly maintain its neutrality, but only insofar as it prescribes the “conflictual” structure of the steps that must be taken and the stages that must be transcended for a genuine development of the self. If in this case the ego is “deprived” of sense only temporarily—until the moment it manages to integrate this violence, not only achieving self-awareness but integrating the structure of otherness within its own subjective structure—then in the case of the disintegration process, *mental violence* is pure aggression against the ego, and it cannot be resolved simply. Symbolic realization, however, is meant to recognize this violence, returning to the stage the ego is stuck in and restoring contact with the patient (taking into consideration the symbolism at stake there). Although here we cannot claim the neutrality of the phenomenon of violence, neither are we conceiving of it as being “destructive of sense” (Staudigl 2013: 44).

Perhaps we should admit that *mental violence* is not only a violence directed toward the ego, but also a key point in the subjective structures of the ego that can be described phenomenologically. It must accordingly be integrated into therapy by psychoanalysts. It makes the ego a victim in both types of cases analyzed, but in the case of the disintegration process it breaks down all that the ego has built up until that moment, whereas in a normal development of the ego (in infant development), its presence is meant to attest to the necessity of transcending a current

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<sup>22</sup> For a critical point of view on this topic, see Vorobej (2016).

<sup>23</sup> As Galtung (1969: 171) explicitly states, “the present definition of violence is entirely located on the consequenceside”.

<sup>24</sup> For more on micro-phenomenology, see not only Eskandari et al. (2015), but also Depraz et al. (2017).

developmental stage. Last but not least, to admit, after all, the existence of such a form of violence—which cannot be simply circumscribed and put into a category—is to create the necessary space not only for a *dia-logos* between psychoanalytic therapy and phenomenology, but also for a relational practice resulting from their inter-articulation.

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