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Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology, Volume 23, Number 2, June 2016,  
pp. 129-146 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ppp.2016.0012>



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# PHILOSOPHY AND MADNESS. RADICAL TURNS IN THE NATURAL ATTITUDE TO LIFE

WOUTER KUSTERS



**ABSTRACT:** In this article, the relation between philosophy and madness is examined from both the perspective of phenomenological philosophy and psychiatry, and the narratives of those with a diagnosis of psychosis. Three theses are proposed: 1) a (phenomenological) philosophical attitude toward psychotic experience yields more insightful, substantial descriptions of madness, 2) serious and consistent philosophical reasoning shows remarkable affinities and similarities with patterns in psychotic experience, and 3) from madness proto-philosophical thought springs forward. In following the lines of intense mad ‘hyper-reflexivity’ and perplexity we may discover a rich world of para-philosophy, one that corresponds with philosophical ideas driven by a less strained reflexivity and wonder. By examining the relation between philosophy and madness, both parties may profit: psychotic experience may be further clarified and brought into easier relation with non-psychotic thought and practice, and philosophy may gain by widening its range of perspectives on reality and human subjectivity.

**KEYWORDS:** Philosophy of time, phenomenology, madness, psychosis, psychiatry, Husserl, narrativity, Deleuze

**I**N THIS ARTICLE, I examine the relation between philosophy and madness. It is often assumed that madness has to be suppressed, excluded, or conquered before a philosophically sensible text, logical argument, or world of meaning can appear. I argue, instead, that a certain concept

of madness, when grafted on phenomenological psychiatry and philosophical mysticism, is intrinsically related to the project of philosophy. With the help of experiences of madness as presented in psychiatry and articulated in mad autobiographical reports, including my own, I will show that philosophy and madness are in closer connection than is commonly assumed.

In the introduction, I refer to some superficial similarities between the two domains, and I define the domain of investigation. Next, I discuss the way these two relate to each other. What is the contribution of philosophy for an investigation into madness? To what extent is madness an effect or result of philosophy? What kind of philosophical dispositions emerge from madness? In the last section, I draw some conclusions.

## A RELATIONSHIP IN OBLIVION

The discussions in the backrooms of academic philosophy correspond, with respect to their monologous form and content, and especially their world strangeness and detachment of daily practice, with quite a few dialogues and monologues in the smoking rooms of the psychiatric ward. Instead of interpreting this observation as a pejorative for philosophy, I argue that this is an heuristically interesting and inspiring similarity.

Although this similarity does not come as a surprise for the novice, the philosopher seldom considers it seriously. Wittgenstein (1969, par. 467) remarks:

I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again ‘I know that that’s a tree’, pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: ‘This fellow isn’t insane. We are only doing philosophy.’

This aphorism is commonly interpreted as implying that although philosophical activity and conversation may seem to an outsider to be insane, it concerns in fact highly specialized work. Less heard of is the other possible implication: that the fellow is indeed insane and involved in philosophical activity. This is the proposal of this article: philosophy and madness are each other’s bedfellows, whether they mirror each other, are each other’s parody, horizon, basis, or ultimate consequence.

The deep connection between madness and philosophy has unfortunately largely been forgotten and hidden for the last decades, or even the last couple of centuries. In a few cases, madness, especially in a manic or Dionysian guise, has been used as a conceptual crowbar to break through modernity and to criticize modern forms of reason and knowledge, as well as the powers that rest on them (Foucault, 1972). In Deleuze and Guattari’s work (1980), becoming-mad or going-through-madness stands for “absolute deterritorialisation,” “lines of flight,” or possibilities to escape from systems. Although the value of these investigations can hardly be underestimated, my approach is a different one. On the one hand, I start from the perspective of doing philosophy, especially in its phenomenological form, and in that sense this article belongs to the philosophy discipline. On the other hand, my start consists of the notes, texts, and experiences of those who have by modern psychiatry been deemed manic, schizophrenic, and psychotic. In this way, this article belongs to the small, but highly expert and productive trend in modern phenomenological psychopathology that does take the philosophy–madness connection into account. For instance, Sass (1994, p. ix) starts the preface to his *Paradoxes of Delusion* straightforwardly as follows: “This is an essay on

philosophy and madness—on madness as akin to philosophy, on philosophy as a kind of madness.” This neo-phenomenological tradition builds on an earlier, mainly German, tradition of phenomenological psychiatry (cf. for instance, Binswanger, 1960, 1965; Blankenburg, 1971; Conrad, 1958; Jaspers, 1913; Minkowski, 1933; and the selection of classical texts in Straus, Zutt, & Sattes, 1963), and has become an international, well-established research school with landmark studies by, among others, Fuchs (2000), Ratcliffe (2008), Sass (1992, 1994), and Stanghellini (2004).

In addition, because my work also includes my own experiences with madness, while not repudiating these, this article can also be considered as belonging to, or at least, relating to the newly emerging discipline, loosely called, ‘mad studies’ (cf. Ingram, 2005; LeFrançois, Menzies, & Reaume, 2013).

This work in neo-phenomenological psychopathology as well as by Foucault and Deleuze notwithstanding, the connection between madness and philosophy is far too seldom appreciated in our age. First, this can be explained and understood by the fact that the medical profession has claimed madness for its domain of expertise, and has rewritten madness as a medical and especially neurobiological problem. Furthermore, a link between madness and philosophy could easily suggest that everyone pretending to be a thinker, let alone a philosopher, would run a higher risk of falling into madness. For those craving wisdom, the thought that a fulfilled desire might consist of the seeming emptiness of madness, provides a rather uninviting prospect. In our age, then, madness is mostly referred to as a zone of illness and suffering (however, again, see the above mentioned neo-phenomenological psychopathology). Those who wear the signs of overt madness are withdrawn from the public sphere and hidden from the public eye. They are perceived as specters of utter meaninglessness and senseless deviancy, not as inspiring examples for philosophy. And so the luxuriance of the mad world is under threat to, eventually, be lost. This article might be read as an attempt to save madness from the oblivion of medical archives and the isolating discourse of medical illness, to bring it back to the communal world of life, meaning, and philosophy.

## OBSERVATIONS, DESCRIPTIONS AND EXAMINATIONS

In this section, I present some surface observations on the similarities between philosophy and madness, with respect to their monologues and textual forms. In madness and philosophy there are two opposed tendencies. The first is to be succinct, compact and dense or even ‘hermetic.’ We find this tendency when we ask a madman what is going on or what is wrong with him. He may answer for example: “The jewel is in the lotus,” or “Inside my thoughts there is a bottomless well,” or “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously,” or maybe he is even more terse and remains silent. Or perhaps he laughs or cries and slaps the questioner with one hand on one cheek. The psychiatrist may describe this condition, without much further notice, as ‘poverty of speech.’ Similar reactions can be elicited from the philosopher when he is asked what exactly is his point. He may speak concisely and hermetically—and paradoxically: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” Or he claims “There is nothing outside the text,” or he declaims “Existence precedes essence,” or perhaps he sighs “I cannot explain It.”

This tendency toward the simple, the aphoristic or, more critically phrased, toward the mystic or the pontification, has its counterpart in another tendency, namely that toward the endless argument, the swelling text, the expanding system. In the mad case, we may think of the meandering stories loosely knit by free association, which wriggle out of the rules and contexts of the conversation and wander endlessly. The psychiatrist in this case may write down ‘poverty of content of speech.’ In the philosophical case, we are familiar with the continuous efforts to say and contain everything, to include and phrase the whole, even including the infinite, the incomprehensible and ineffable.

Philosophers command both possibilities. They may collect their aphorisms in thin books full of esoteric or logico-symbolic formulas. Or, when they find an appropriate medium or publisher, they may write long elaborated texts and books, in which they repeat their wisdoms and insights, in different words, in better words, in other contexts, in new attempts.

In this respect, madmen are stuck in a double-bind position or catch 22 situation. When they utter little or nothing, they soon become labeled schizophrenic, catatonic, and verbally or cognitively impaired. On the other hand, when all cautions are thrown to the wind, when they explicate and explain everything, when they testify to their whole cosmos, then they are all too easily called incoherent, fragmented, or manic.

In this article, I use both textual strategies. The meaning of the initial terms ‘madness’ and ‘philosophy’ become clear only in the end, through the whole text. I elaborate on the relation between these two in an extensive and expansive whole, and their connection can only be really grasped in the perspective of the disappearing horizon and vanishing ground to which I allude. On the other hand, I propose, here at the beginning, some initial definitions and descriptions of the concepts of philosophy and madness.

Philosophy should be understood as a linguistic expression of both amazement and the object of that amazement. It is also a reflection on this amazement, on its object, and, further, on this reflection itself. It covers all consequences of this inbuilt self-referentiality implied by the description, which are the propelling condition for the corpus and tradition of philosophy as I define them. This is not an innovative or unusual definition of philosophy and it can be traced back to Greek philosophy, see for example, Plato’s dialogue *Theaetetus* (155c–d): “Theaetetus: ‘By the gods, Socrates, I am lost in wonder when I think of all these things, and sometimes when I regard them it really makes my head swim.’ Socrates: ‘Theodorus seems to be a pretty good guesser about your nature. For this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy.’ With this definition, then, I aim at nothing more than just the corpus of texts that are taught and used in institutions engaged with philosophy.

The concept of madness needs a little more introduction. As a first hold, it may be related to the term ‘psychosis’ as used in psychiatry. Psychosis refers to the state of mind of someone with so-called hallucinations and delusions, who shows bizarre, incomprehensible, and unpredictable be-

havior. With the term ‘madness,’ I refer to the most extreme and typical form of psychosis, in which symptoms are most florid. This is called an ‘acute psychosis’ in psychiatry and is distinguished from chronic states of psychoses, which are longer lasting and contrast less obviously with more ordinary states of mind. In psychiatry psychosis is analyzed and classified in various ways: for example, the mood during psychosis (depressive, schizoaffective, manic psychosis), the psychosis-triggering factor (critical life event, poisoning, trauma, brain damage), the kind of delusion (paranoid, megalomaniac, delusion of reference), the interpretation of the psychosis in life history (psychosis as illness, as crisis, as spiritual emergency, as moment of self-insight), and so on. I will not follow such finer-grained distinctions, but will follow instead the phenomenological psychiatric tradition that looks for structures and processes in psychosis in general and that interprets these with a philosophical/phenomenological terminology (cf. especially Podvoll, 1990). To transpose psychosis from a medical context to philosophical discourse, I describe it concisely and densely as: 1) a possible expression of the desire for infinity within a world that is defined as finite, as 2) the incomprehensible, that disappears beyond the horizon the moment we think to grasp it, and that becomes manifest in a socially and mentally unacceptable form, and as 3) the moment in a conversation that one of the interlocutors decides to halt the interaction, legitimizing this by adducing that communication would no longer be possible and motivating this by calling the other ‘psychotic.’ I will provide these short descriptions with more content below, and in the process show how the medical concept of ‘psychosis’ will change into an idea that fans out into philosophy and mysticism.

My way to bring madness and philosophy together is as follows. The first step is to apply psychiatric and philosophical phenomenology to elucidate and explicate experiences of madness. In this exercise, I base myself on a range of autobiographies as well as the memories of my own psychotic episode. My proposal is that a philosophically informed psychiatry results in better and more adequate insights into madness than what empirical psychopathology can provide.

However, whereas the phenomenologist is moving toward a brighter insight, madness approaches and creeps into the phenomenologist. Thus, the second phase in the dialectic of madness and philosophy is that the philosopher no longer observes and contemplates the object of psychosis from a distance, but rather himself converges toward madness and, finally, falls prey to and merges with what was meant to be no more than a mere object of examination. This second step consists, on the one hand, in the general proposition that consequent philosophy may lead—at least on a textual level—to forms of madness, and on the other hand, in the exemplification of this process in my own experience and those of some other notable philosophers. I will show what kinds of philosophy and ‘philosophoids’ may emerge from madness.

## PHILOSOPHY ABOUT MADNESS

In this section, I propose and discuss a kind of philosophy that has madness as its research domain. Phenomenological philosophy, when it is concerned with psychosis, has as its data the narratives of people who have mad experiences, and the reports and analyses of psychiatrists who share a phenomenological approach. Our philosophy about madness dovetails with this phenomenological psychiatry, although we are less focused on individual case studies or on practical implications for therapy and care, which is often the primary concern. Instead, just as authors like Fuchs, Ratcliffe, Sass, and Stanghellini, we examine closely how exactly mad experience is like, and what exactly happens in a mad world or reality, to amplify our insights in general into human experience and reality.

An important methodological tool or attitude is the attention to the substantiality of the negative. In psychiatry illness is often defined privatively, that is, as the absence of health. Psychopathologists often feel content to characterize mad experience as a disturbed attention function, as disturbed perception and cognition, or as a disordered sense of time. Instead, I show what these supposed lacks and disorders actually mean. I transform the negative predicate of disorder into

a ‘positive,’ alternative, substantial description. What does mad experience actually contain, how can we describe it, without only referring to what is lacking or disordered? I discuss this for three important aspects of mad experience, the theme of reality, of cognition and perception, and of temporal experience.

#### GRADATIONS IN REALITY

It is often claimed that psychotic persons do not live in reality. They suffer from a disturbed sense of reality; perhaps they may be described as patients with a ‘de-realization’ disorder, or, in psychoanalytic terms, they would not acknowledge the ‘reality principle.’ In these observations and descriptions, it is seldom said, let alone analyzed, what exactly is meant with the supposed lack of reality, and the question remains: if you do not live in reality, or your experiences are not real, where else does experience take place? How can we make sense of, and how do we frame mad experience and the mad world, with respect to two general but contradictory propositions: 1) there is only one reality, and 2) everyone has his own reality. To examine such questions, we must first further analyze conceptions of what reality would consist of, according to both psychiatrists and common sense. We find that conceptions of reality and unreality are buttressed by four dimensions: 1) modality (something is necessary, possible, impossible), 2) temporality (situation with respect to time, past, present, future), 3) objectivity (subjective, intersubjective, objective), and 4) continuity (causal, contiguous, or discontinuous relations). Measures and gradations in reality, or ‘realness,’ depend on the constellation of these four dimensions. For example, an experience counts as more real, the more it is valued as ‘necessary’ (modality dimension) and causally connected to other events (continuity dimension). The sun setting behind the horizon is more real than the famous picture which may be viewed as either a rabbit or a duck. The more unreal experience of, for example, a duck in this case depends on its mere possibility (modality dimension) and its subjectivity (objectivity dimension). (See also Kusters [2014, p. 59ff.], Müller [2009, p. 288], & Van Duppen [2015], and for similar analyses of reality modulations, Sass, 1992, p. 43 ff.; 1994.)

In autobiographical reports, experiences of madness are both described as unreal, dream-like, surrealist, fiction-like (‘hypo-real’)—and at the same time as more real, more intense, more impressive, more awake than ever (‘hyper-real’). Landis remarks (1964, p. 373): “It is in a sense paradoxical that nothing can be more real than the experience of unreality.” With the help of the four dimensions, such claims and apparent contradictions can be analyzed more thoroughly and related to philosophical discussions about ‘the reality of reality’ without thereby simply dismissing mad experiences and expressions as disturbed speech, delusional experience, or a disordered sense of reality. Mad experience then turns out not to lack reality, but to be based on another composition of the underlying dimensions, which is what leads to these simultaneous feelings of hyper-reality and hypo-reality. The task of the philosopher is to analyze these data from madness, to comprehend them in their own value, and to base the analysis in philosophical concepts. By tracing mad experience in the process of madness, common sense reality falls apart and philosophical wonder is fed by and involved in a thought experiment that has its roots in ‘real’ mad experience. For instance, when the dimension of modality is ‘necessity’ and combines with ‘subjectivity,’ this may lead to mad experiences as described by an anonymous in Kaplan (1964, p. 94):

I was suddenly confronted with an overwhelming conviction that I had discovered the secrets of the universe, which were being rapidly made plain with incredible lucidity. The truths discovered seemed to be known immediately and directly, with absolute certainty. I had no sense of doubt or awareness of the possibility of doubt. In spite of former atheism and strong antireligious sentiments, I was suddenly convinced that it was possible to prove rationally the existence of God.

In this example, inner convictions concerning the whole, the totality of existence and its grounds, come under the light of ‘necessity.’ As a philosopher, we may follow these experiences, in both their logical and argumentative consequences, as well as in their practical working-out, and relate and compare these to arguments and discussions concerning, for instance, rationalism and proofs of God. This approach corresponds quite closely to Sass’s (1994) comparison of Schreber’s and

Wittgenstein's expressions, reflections and dealings with self and solipsism (see further my 2014 book, *Filosofie van de waanzin*).

#### PERCEPTION IN THOUGHT

A second theme in the philosophy of madness concerns the related concepts of cognition and perception. Again, the method is to explicate in a substantial way what is usually only referred to as disturbed cognition (delusions) and disturbed perception (hallucinations). A phenomenological and conceptual analysis of the common sense meanings of 'thought' and 'perception' leads to reflection on—and radical doubt about—the common sense notions of 'inside' (locus of thought, the subject and the time of consciousness) and 'outside' (locus of perception, the object and the time of the physis).

Under such analysis, the expressions and reports of mad people about what they 'see,' 'think,' 'understand,' and so on are more adequately accounted for: disorders on the surface level are explainable as a deep change in the relation between what counts as 'inside' and as 'outside.' On the surface level of ordinary language, we also meet such metaphorical exchanges between an inner and an outer domain, for example, in sentences such as: "I see what your point is" (see also Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Madness may be understood as a far-reaching idiosyncratic metaphorization and de-metaphorization of language, thought, and experience. Madness is not marked by a summation of separate delusions and hallucinations, but by a coherent world of experience where the division between what counts as an inner thought and as an outer perception radically differs (see also Kusters, 2014, p. 91 ff.)—although we should add that this coherence can be well experienced as conflictuous or even incoherent, in the sense that it does not make expressible (common) sense. Such a model provides the background in which so-called delusions and hallucinations, instead of as a privative lack, can be understood as an alternative possibility, symbolization, or world order (see Kusters, 2014, p. 605 ff.). By detaching ourselves from our presuppositions, our habitual way to distinguish thought from perception, we gain more insight and understanding into mad

worlds. And thereby we approach madness much closer than an observing, measuring psychologist with a theory that is supported by a naive, pre-philosophical view on what reality is.

#### THE ENIGMA OF TIME

A third important theme in madness, which philosophy can elucidate and where psychology fails, is temporality. I discuss, analyze, and problematize our ordinary common sense conception of time, so as to facilitate philosophical reflection on time and become receptive to mad experience of time.

In daily life, we hardly care about what time exactly is. Without any notable problems we use diaries and clocks and we speak in spatial prepositions and expressions of movement—as in "after a week," "coming month," and so on—without being aware of semantic implications or philosophical complications. However, when we contemplate what time exactly is, we become entangled in conceptual and philosophical problems. The enigma of time is insoluble; the philosopher may try to bend over time, but while doing so still remains in time.

The mad person ends up in similar problems and paradoxes as does the philosopher of time. The contradiction in which both get entangled is that between a notion of time as an inner experience and as an outer phenomenon (for an extensive overview of this discussion, see Gale, 1968). In this last conception, time is part of nature and representable as an in-itself unchanging linear axis. On this line there is no room for notions like 'past' and 'present,' because the judgment of what would be a past moment or the present moment, is not absolute and depends on the changing moment of judgment itself. From this perspective, only relations between moments (earlier-than, later-than, simultaneous-with) may be called real and temporal.

In the other perspective, time is subjective and an aspect of consciousness. There would only be a present, in which past and future are mere modalities. This implies that the present, \*this\* moment, is the only real moment, and it comprises all expectations of the future and memories of the past. This vision is irreconcilable and in sharp contrast with the other vision, according to which the

present is an infinitely thin and merely imaginary limit between two real extensions, forwards and backwards, and in which the determination of the present depends on the moment of determination.

These time problems know a long history; let us just remember Augustine's famous remark: "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know." And Ricoeur (1988, p. 21) says: "The problem of time cannot be attacked from a single side only, whether of the soul or movement. The distension of the soul alone cannot produce the extension of time; the dynamism of movement alone cannot generate the dialectic of the threefold present." In daily life, these problems play hardly any role, and are neglected or suppressed. But when these problems come to the foreground, for the philosopher and the madman, they may lead to compact aphorisms, confusion, and endless elaborations.

Now and then someone comes up with an apparently epoch-making insight or breakthrough. Let's consider John McTaggart, and his article "The Unreality of Time" (1908), with which he stood as the forerunner of modern analytic thought on time. McTaggart concluded from the contradiction between the two theories of time, that time plainly cannot exist. This unreal, although well-argued, 'deconstruction' of time brings McTaggart's thoughts much closer to the mad experience of time than any of the common observations according to which someone in a psychosis would be 'disoriented' in time—while there is no clue whatsoever of what this 'disorientation' could possibly mean.

This correspondence between the conception (or epoch-making insight) of McTaggart, and the psychotic experience (often also experienced as an overwhelming insight) has also been noted by psychiatrist and philosopher Matthew Broome, who says (Broome, 2005, p. 191)

McTaggart notoriously claimed that time was unreal and that nothing that exists can have the property of being in time... Presumably McTaggart did not act on his unusual belief, or else kept it to the philosophy study; however some of our patients do... Such patients may describe a determinate, static almost crystalline structure of time where there is no change ... Such an existence is almost divine-eternal and unchanging, 'pure being.'

Compare also a quote of a psychotic person in Brett (2002, p. 327): "Time has disappeared. Not that it is longer or shorter, it's just not there; there are bits and pieces of time, shaken and mingled; often there is no time at all."

To follow mad experience of time, without prejudices and lowering our presuppositions, the philosophy of madness uses the analyses of time of thinkers ranging from Aristotle and Plotinus to McTaggart, Husserl, Ricoeur and Taylor, and we note that these philosophical movements of thought skim narrowly along the abyss of madness. Broome indeed rightly observes that McTaggart's analysis of time may very well be the beginning of a disclosure of mad experience. Unfortunately, Broome himself does draw a different conclusion, namely about the impossibility of further examination:

An illness [severe psychosis] that included such bizarre beliefs would likely render communication with the patient, and phenomenological description of their symptoms, almost impossible." That is to say, what happens when the madman, just like the philosopher, cannot reconcile the two visions on time? Will he deny time, fall out of time, or will time fall out of him? How do the philosopher and the madman deal with the aporia, in text and outside text? At this point in the analysis, we must part from the kind of descriptive psychopathology in which knowledge about time is presupposed on the part of the researcher, and ignorance, confusion, and disorientation about time on the side of the research-object, the psychotic person. In the philosophy of time, the philosopher can at most clarify and elaborate the enigmas of time, not solve them. (2005, p. 191)

I briefly sketch three possible new focuses emerge from mad experience of time (see also Kusters, 2014, p. 118 ff.). The first one is space; time in madness spatializes (cf. Minkowski, 1933). For example, in madness you do not remember war (e.g., WWII, Nazi-Germany) in the past, but you see the war, in the green-brown warlike dress of passers-by, in certain allusive car brands (Mercedes, Volkswagen), in snatches of conversations around you. What once remained at safe distance, sunk in the past, may return in an intensive way in the spatial present—threatening, but also attainable and manipulable. The second focus is number. Although in madness borders shift between inside and outside, perception and thought, time and



space, numbers remain numbers, and computations of time and of dates, juggling with numbers, tends to remain the same. Temporal numbers may come alive in an alternative way in space. For example, September 11, 9/11, may receive a loaded meaning when the mad person perceives and processes this combination in similar ways in both newspapers and historical accounts, as on license plates, zip codes, house numbers, credit card combinations, and so on. The third focus, to which Broome also refers, is eternity. In madness, clocks and calendars may lose their meaning and vanish as such; the inner sense of time may no longer be connected or bound by the external time axis, which normally covers and limits the extension, finiteness, and determinateness of life. Then, the madman may discover, in the detached present, the gate to eternity—irrespective of whether this concerns heaven or hell. Broome also remarks (2005, p. 193): “Eternal torment and eternal divinity may be two aspects of the same temporal phenomenon.” Moreover, the distinction between life and death can change: death and dying are no longer events far away in future time, as a receding horizon, but take place in the present spatial environment. Therefore, space will become more meaningful: death becoming a concrete spatial object, a shade in a corner of the eye, a black dog speeding away on a flat screen in a shop window.

Through the philosophical implosion of time, the unpredictable oscillations in reality proportions, and the shifts between inner and outer worlds, a world emerges that abounds in a not yet fully determined or crystallized meaning. But, different from what is held by bio-psychiatrists like Kapur (2003; cf. also my discussion of Kapur in Kusters, 2014, p. 402 ff.), such a generation of meaning is not only a bottom-up effect resulting from too much dopamine in the brain, but no less the effect of an existential twist, a conceptual turn inside out, or a philosophical inversion of time experience.

In this first aspect of the relation between philosophy and madness, everything seems to be attracted and prompted by the enigma of time. Ordinary conceptions of reality are supported by (not easily explicable) changed conceptions and attitudes to time. The difference between thought

and perception, between inside and outside, is related with the riddle of time. And, when we want to understand madness through a philosophy or phenomenology of time, for example, by following McTaggart, we end up in a similar amazement or perplexity, a similar kind of *aporia* as the madman.

## FROM PHILOSOPHY TO MADNESS

Almost unnoticed we drifted from the first level of a philosophy about madness to a second level, where philosophy brings us closer to madness. For this level, there is evidence of, first, a biographical, a philosophical–substantial, second, and, third, a philosophical–autobiographical kind.

### PHILOSOPHERS STRUCK BY MADNESS

Of several philosophers it is known that their way of thinking and passionate involvement in contemplation had brought them to or even over the edge of madness. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, had already written an extensive and comprehensive oeuvre when he underwent an extraordinary experience. Praying in front of a statue of Christ, Thomas was struck by an epoch-making insight or vision, after which he ceased writing entirely. Nobody knows what exactly happened, but it has been noted that he said (quoted in Weisheipl, 1974, p. 321): “All that I have written appears to be as so much straw after the things that have been revealed to me.” Had madness struck? Did this flash of madness put an end to Thomas’s serious philosophy, or do these words instead express Thomas’s climax of wisdom? What is cause and what is effect here? Did another (bodily, neurological) factor precede and determine these famous last words by Aquinas? Does this moment of revelatory truth contain traces of Thomas’s earlier work and thought? A few centuries later Blaise Pascal was struck by the lightning of madness, and he wrote during this short episode of insight: “Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and the scholars. I will not forget thy word. Amen.” Unlike that of Aquinas, Pascal’s extraordinary experience led him to continue writing, although in a more philosophical and theological way.

Many other well-known and lesser known philosophers have undergone periods of madness (e.g., Hume, Cantor, and Foucault), among whom Nietzsche may be the most famous and intriguing example. Eleven years before his death he broke down, after which he fell prey to an irreversible kind of madness. From then on Nietzsche did not philosophize, write, and, after a while, even speak comprehensibly. In this respect, Nietzsche is a prime example of destructive madness. We could consider Nietzsche's madness as unrelated to his work, and only stemming from an infection with syphilis. However, already in his earlier works some notice a tendency toward madness. With his merciless mocking and cultural criticisms, he shocked the foundations of society; he might have gone so deep that he also shook his own foundations. Historical scrutiny may further find out what directions of connections and motivations are most promising to accentuate.

#### AN INHERENT TENDENCY TO MADNESS

Disregarding the personal life and vicissitudes of philosophers, we can also examine the actual propositions and consequences of philosophical ideas and theories with regard to mad experience. Some kinds of philosophy seem to lead to quite absurd or even mad consequences should we take them too seriously in actual daily life. Take for instance the thought that there does not exist consciousness or free will, and that everything can only be determined by genes and neurons on the one hand, and social determinants on the other hand. Our 'I' would be a mere plaything of external forces that penetrate and guide us without our notice. When taking such thoughts to their consequences, we may easily end up in a world structurally similar to the world of madness, which is also occupied and controlled by voices and external influences and powers. With respect to solipsism, or radical skepticism, Sass remarks (1994, p. 50): "Unlike the skeptical philosopher who can leave his metaphysical speculations behind in his study, many schizophrenics live the solipsistic vision with a certain literalness, which may express itself in a feeling that combine ultimate responsibility with awesome fear." Testimonies from these deterministic or solipsistic mad worlds may be considered

as a kind of test case or parody with respect to the practical usefulness of such kinds of philosophy (cf. also the discussion of McTaggart).

In addition to taking such practical consequences and results into account, we can also examine whether philosophical methods in general have a tendency toward madness. We find this idea in the work of Wolfgang Blankenburg, a German phenomenological psychiatrist. According to Blankenburg, the core phenomenon of psychosis would be the loss of the quality of the 'natural self-evidence.' Blankenburg (1971, p. 60) borrows this term from a self-description by a patient of his, Anne Rau, who says about the natural self-evidence [translation by author]: "such a small affair ... such an important affair, without which it is impossible to live ... so self-evidential... It does not concern knowledge, you cannot simply see it and understand it... It must be something that stems from your nature." With the concept of natural self-evidence, Blankenburg refers to a basic sense of security, a fundamental and plain care-freeness or trust in existence, a sharing of a common sense basis of being-in-the-world. This basic sense of trust or faith in existence would normally be stable on the background, it would be pre-reflective. Its lack would lead to an apparently too high level of—according to others—irrelevant reflexivity (see Blankenburg, 1971, p. 60 ff., and below).

Blankenburg claims that the tendency toward doubting and reflecting on the natural self-evidence is not only a problem of the psychotic person, but also an essential ingredient of the phenomenological method (1971, p. 64): "A genuine understanding of the alienation [in psychosis, W.K.] by the psychiatrist essentially demands some steps of self-alienation, a certain loosening of the anchoring of consciousness in the ground of healthy habituality in daily consciousness." Blankenburg uses Husserl's phenomenological method for this self-alienation and says (1971, p. 65): "Husserl went so far in his later works and he said that the complete phenomenological stance and the thereto belonging turn were meant to 'effect a full personal transformation.' It is demanded to give up the natural stance toward knowledge, but what is also at stake is 'a radical turn in the natural attitude to life.'"

The method here concerns the inclination of phenomenology to arrive, as does the mad person, at alienation, growing doubts, and amazement or confusion about the foundations of daily life. We could conceive such phenomenological thought experiments as the safe counterparts to psychedelic experiments, for example, taking LSD or mescaline, that have also been claimed to provide informing insights about psychosis for the psychiatrist in education (cf. Osmond, 1967, and Kusters, 2014). For the psychiatrist, this may be a dangerous but insightful method to explore madness. For phenomenology in general, this is a remarkable finding, especially when we would want to use phenomenological methods to gain insight into daily practices to improve them. Although philosophy may be instrumental in practice, it also contains a dangerous seduction, or sting, which may destroy this same practice, instead of illuminate it. The zone to where the madman—whether he wants it or not—is swept away, is, according to Blankenburg, the same area which the phenomenologist tries, with much effort, to penetrate. Blankenburg makes similar arguments for Descartes and his doubt experiment. Blankenburg notes that Descartes, before starting his potentially destabilizing and radical doubt, had secured and prepared himself in his work and life, to not be carried fully away by his radical doubts. This parallels the mystic who, after a long period of training and preparation, may indulge in similar existential and experiential spheres as the mad person without being swept away to the same extent.

Louis Sass argues similarly in his *Madness and Modernism*. In addition to Husserl's philosophy, he discerns in many kinds of philosophy, like Derrida's, an inclination toward detachment from daily life, radical doubt, enduring conceptual instability, exploitation of semantic ambivalences, and so on, that we all also find in mad experience. For instance, Sass draws a comparison between the psychotic attitude toward language, and Derrida's ideas (1992, p. 200): "The parallels between the hyperbolic Mallarmean [i.e., Derrida's] vision and the autonomisation of language in schizophrenia are fairly obvious." (See also Sass, 1994.)

One step further, we could even argue that not only philosophical methods, but also its very 'substance' is close to madness. This claim is made and thoroughly elaborated in Strassberg's work *Der Wahnsinn der Philosophie* (trans. *Madness of Philosophy*, 2014), in which the author shows the role of 'deep concepts' within philosophy, like infinity and imagination, and their role in philosophies from Plato and Bruno, to Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Deleuze. This work is quite similar in its perspectives to Blankenburg's and Sass's, although Strassberg does not start from psychotic experience toward philosophical textual movements, but instead, searches, for psychotic themes within the whole architecture of philosophical works.

Following Blankenburg, Sass, and Strassberg, I claim that it is intrinsic to philosophy to initiate and enhance similar processes as in madness: conceptual analyses without purpose or end, examinations of the self by the self, and enduring amazement about the existence of things, both separately and in their totality. Of course, such lines of free-floating ideas are more easily started in a philosophy that has little connection with or input from daily life. A philosophy about medical decisions and human values, for instance, will be less inclined to drift away toward mad zones, because the concepts and problems are more directly attached to and embedded in practice. In the philosophy of modern metaphysicians, monologous system builders, totalizing analytic philosophers, quasi-dialogical Deleuzians, and other more esoteric niche-like academic strands of philosophy, the contemplator and the contemplated join each other more easily and may merge into a more intense unit and interaction, during which interference from daily environment is more easily avoided. And after all, although since the Kantian turn the stability of subject-independent consideration of concepts is being stressed more, the ideal of a more Platonic 'inner' contemplation, a coincidence of thinker and thought, remains a leading principle in philosophical exercise.

In much philosophical consideration and contemplation, the subject of thought, the philosopher, approaches slowly but certainly the object

that is being thought of. The chances of border traffic become higher, the subject wrestles with the object, and the object may well contaminate the subject. When the object is madness, madness may also get the philosopher in its grip. Remember what Nietzsche wrote (1886, aphorism 146): “He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you.”

#### FLOW TOWARD CRYSTAL

In 2007, I examined Husserl’s philosophy of time, to analyze and elucidate time experience in madness (Husserl, 1991; see also Kusters, 2014, p. 261 ff.). I argued that the more you follow Husserl’s analysis of time, the more you descend into an ideal consciousness, to finally arrive at a mysterious ineffable beginning. In making a close reading, an intense philosophical study of madness and time, I was dragged away myself into this same madness. I wrote in my study, just a couple of weeks before being diagnosed with psychosis (cited in Kusters, 2014, p. 266):

The fluid ‘water’ time of Husserl is the ultimate consequence of his movement of thought from the outside world to the inside (see Ricoeur, 2004, p. 109). At first he doubts the (earthly) common sense conception of time, and says that time has nothing to do with clocks, day and night rhythms or other aspects of the outside world, and he searches for the subjective conditions for the existence of such matters. Next Husserl ascribes a complex structure of primary and secondary memories and expectations to the subjective conditions and experience of time, and he relates such a structure to subjective conditions of other modalities, like fantasy, perception and imagination. In a third step Husserl examines the conditions for the possibilities of this complex subjective time structure, and he arrives at an absolute inner consciousness of time, that is a ‘flow.’ However, we can hardly say more about this flow, because it is not part of the phenomenal world, and even not of the conditions of the phenomenal world. Husserl says:

We can say nothing other than the following: This flow is something we speak of in conformity with what is constituted, but it is not “something in objective time.” It is absolute subjectivity and has the absolute properties of something to be designated metaphorically as “flow”; of something that originates in a point of actuality, in a primal

source-point, “the now,” and so on. In the actuality-experience we have the primal source-point and a continuity of moments of reverberation. For all of this, we lack names (Husserl, 1991, p. 79).

In this quote we see that names lack: the absolute consciousness is neither a moving flow, nor a stand-still. It is an ineffable ‘something’ that is nevertheless conditional to all experiences of time and the temporality of objects.

When you think you have made a discovery of ‘something’ with Husserl—in other words, when you suspect that your ‘natural attitude to life’ may be turned around by the insight of phenomenological philosophy—then the temptation looms to elaborate on this eureka moment, not only by compact and hermetic wisdoms, but through longer argument. The ‘something,’ the ‘flow’ receives words, in spite of itself, which leads to further words and actions. I wrote subsequently (cited in Kusters, 2014, p. 268):

When discussing empirical subjects (that is here, mad subjects), and to interpret variation in time experience, we need to give more body to this empty flow metaphor. Then we adduce more metaphors and images from the ‘objective world’ into our research, but as long as we remain aware of this operation, this seems a legitimate move. In such a proposal of a phenomenology that is more filled in, we conserve Husserl’s project, but to avoid speaking about time as a mysterious streaming *nunc stans* of a transcendental ego, we consciously introduce some further metaphors ...

For the time experience of an empirical psychotic subject, the fluid metaphor of the vortex may be appropriate. ‘Normal’ subjects can be conceived as filling in the flow metaphor as a ‘river’ where they all sail on, and their boats all move in the same direction. What seems at a far distance and what seems nearby is more or less the same for all sailors. The psychotic subject gets caught by a huge sucking whirlpool in the river that draws him under the surface of the stream of time. Because he is drawn under water, he can no longer perceive the other sailors, his ‘intersubjectivity’ gets lost. Meanwhile he does experience (Husserlian) retention and protention (i.e., primary memory and primary expectation)<sup>1</sup>, but the wider recollection and expectations for the future are no longer linearly ordered and these revolve around him. Times from a far past and far future are experienced inside the vortex as nearby as a just-passed moment in the present.

One month later, I ‘elaborated’ further on this metaphor in quite a practical though psychotic

way. Because the moment you have become aware of the Husserlian flow, the temptation is strong to navigate this same flow and to become master of the rudder and the river yourself. The border area from intensive phenomenology, via the ineffable mystical flow to a magical stirring in the flow, is easily crossed, distinctions are not so clear-cut from within, and the zones of philosophy and madness ‘flow’ into each other ‘fluently.’

Of course, for a full account of the actual, real start of a psychotic process or mad journey, other factors on other levels of explanation and interpretation are of importance, like the social, psychic, or biological level. In addition, this re-staging of my analysis of Husserlian philosophy followed by an episode of madness, does not, of course, prove that phenomenology, or any other kind of philosophy, would necessarily entail madness—just as ethics or moral theory do not lead by themselves to actual improvement of morals and mores. In addition to a flow (in vortex form), an igniter, a spark, or an impulse from elsewhere is also needed (even the most idealist, monistic philosophical systems need, to get off the ground, an impulse from somewhere else, cf. the ‘impetus’ [*Anstoss*] in Fichte’s work). But the point here is that the execution of rigorous philosophical consequentality is an excellent means to reach and simulate madness in a textual or even conceptual or existential form. The much discussed ‘intrinsic incomprehensibility’ of madness can be broken through with apt philosophical thinking through consequences. In this sense, philosophy is an excellent tool to explore the realm of madness, and also a dangerous activity that may lead to immersion into the very same zone.

In my research of 2007 into mad time experience I used, in addition to Husserl as a ‘water’ philosopher, three other philosophers to throw light onto the enigma of (mad) time. These were Aristotle with his earthy time, Plotinus with his airy time, and Deleuze to whom I attributed the metaphor of fire. I just showed how, within my interpretation of Husserl, some seeds of mad impulses, transgressions on essential domains, metaphorizations, and de-metaphorizations can be discerned. The ‘full personal transformation’ then took on rapidly. I realized, discovered, and ‘saw’

how the four seemingly irreconcilable perspectives on time—by the four philosophers with help of the four metaphors—all converged to a central point in a circle, which I took, metaphorically and literally, as crystal. Everything had become crystal clear and illuminated. Below a short impression and description of this philosophical–psychotic (or, in other words, *philochotic*) way of experiencing at that time, after I had discovered ‘the point where everything turns around,’ ‘IT,’ or ‘the Insight’ just shortly before being diagnosed with psychosis in the psychiatric hospital (see Kusters, 2014, p. 43 ff.).<sup>2</sup> Note that during this period on the verge of madness—perhaps in a ‘delusional mood’ or ‘Wahnstimmung’ (cf. Jaspers, 1913; Sass, 1992, p. 44)—I refer to texts, words and thoughts from other times, other moods, other writers (see also below):

Writing such a piece about philosophy and madness is much plodding away: searching all relevant sources together, ordering the material, the texts, making it sensible and understandable, and after lots of efforts, you may attain an acceptable paper. Afterwards, now I know about the secret of the Four, it has turned out to be all efforts for nothing. Now I know IT, and I am able to produce everything from my Insight. Now, let me first sit down well, to write it all down, once again, the final absolute text. If I’d like to, I could rewrite everything I have ever written into a summarily short ‘master version,’ a short journal article. In a couple of pages, it can be phrased succinctly, compact and dense, that in one stroke everything becomes absolutely clear and transparent ...

My earlier text, written just before I received my Insight, was about time and madness. I used four metaphors to say something about time, water, earth, air, and fire. So I have to make four piles of books on my desk, corresponding with the four metaphors. These piles should each be ordered; below the large books with dark colors, possibly some art catalogues, and on top the small paperbacks, with playful and bright colors. With this form of the pile, I also allude to the pyramid, which contains the wisdom of the inside and the insight of the secret of the metaphors. I will prove that the four metaphors of time eventually converge and are the same, and therefore, I will use a fifth metaphor, the crystal. With this crystal I turn my earlier text inside out, I transform the text, I will let text and world change position. I—and Deleuze through me—already announced this in my earlier text (written a couple of weeks before):

The formless of Hölderlin, that is, the abyss (Ungrund) is symbolized. From that abyss or breach emerges, as from a volcano, an 'arch-event,' a symbol, according to Deleuze, who says:

Such a symbol adequate to the totality of time may be expressed in many ways: to throw time out of joint, to make the sun explode, to throw oneself into the volcano, to kill God or the father. This symbolic image constitutes the totality of time to the extent that it draws together the caesura, the before and the after. (1994, p. 112)

Deleuze uses a crystal as symbol. Through the crystal light passes, but is also broken, reflected. In the crystal you may see time. Deleuze says:

The crystal-image was not time, but we see time in the crystal. We see in the crystal the perpetual foundation of time, non-chronological time, Cronos and not Chronos. This is the powerful non-organic life which grips the world. The visionary, the seer, is the one who sees in the crystal, and what he sees is the gushing of time as dividing in two, as splitting." (1989, p. 81)

This is how I wrote earlier. That was all relevant, adequate, and appropriate at that time. But now I see it, and I look right through Deleuze. And I see the Crystal, I see time in the Crystal, I see through the Crystal to the other side of time. But how can I put this insight, this vision into ink, onto paper? It is about the creation of crystal, the source of crystal, the receipt for crystal. It is pure alchemy.

From the fragments in this section we could try to reconstruct a chronology; the events and the moments of thought and speech could be related to a linear time-axis, the clock and the calendar. Then we could try to differentiate between normalcy, pre-psychosis, psychosis, and post-psychosis, as real phenomena developing 'in real time.' And we could try to isolate some fragments that are really in and by themselves psychotic or mad. However, with this presentation, I also want to emphasize that the composing elements or factors of madness stem from different times, different moods, different writers. It is somehow a combination of factors, a rearrangement of data in a somehow 'inappropriate' context, that makes up an event or a person suitable to be diagnosed with psychosis. There is a sense of alchemical frantic searching when we would want to pinpoint 'madness' in a

definite stretch of text, a distinct period of time, or a particular chemical imbalance in the brain.

Now let's conclude this section with these thoughts of crystal alchemy. I have laid out three philosophical lines toward madness; 1) anecdotal evidence from life and fate of famous philosophers, 2) a discussion of the relation between the phenomenological method and the inner process of madness, and 3) an elaboration of my own shifts and oscillations between philosophy and madness.

Essential for the understanding of the relation between philosophy and madness are the following themes: the mystery of time; the irresolvable tension between thought and being, reflection and experience, separateness and union; the familiar and, at the same time, alienating effects of language and signs; the wavering between the compactness of the aphorism and the verbosity of the systematic elaboration; and the subtle, smooth, and hardly, if at all, noticeable transitions between elucidation, illumination and blinding, between myth, reason and myth.

## FROM MADNESS TO PHILOSOPHY

We arrive at the third level of the relation between philosophy and madness, where madness leads back to philosophy again. It is hard to state anything substantial in this area. It is the domain of the paradoxes in language, philosophy and mysticism at the borders of the ineffable. Nevertheless, I will sketch some contours to give some preliminary readings of the psychotic-philosophical twistings that roam there.

### A GRUESOME AND MYSTERIOUS REALM

We can find entrance to the domain where madness is the source and inspiration for philosophy by two terms from psychopathology, that I indirectly referred to above, namely, 'perplexity' and 'hyperreflexivity.' In the authoritative handbook in psychiatry, the DSM-IV, 'confusion' or 'perplexity' is named as a possible feature at the height of an acute psychotic episode. Antony Boisen, theologian, preacher, and himself personally well-acquainted with madness, remarks (1942, p. 24): "In any case he [the madman, W.K.] feels himself in the realm of the mysterious and uncanny. All

the accepted bases of judgment and reasoning are gone. He does not know what to believe. His state is one of utter perplexity regarding the very foundations of his being. “Who am I?” “What is my role in life?” “What is the universe in which I live?” become for him questions of life and death.” Such testimonies of mad confusion and perplexity are amply found in self-reports.

The term ‘hyperreflexivity’ stems from phenomenological psychopathology. Instead of holding that the madman would think wrongly or too little, it is claimed that psychosis is informed by an overwhelming intensity and speed of self-conscious and overconscious thought. Louis Sass says (2003): “Hyperreflexivity refers to a kind of exaggerated self-consciousness, a tendency for focal, objectifying attention to be directed toward processes and phenomena that would normally be ‘inhabited’ or experienced as part of oneself.” (See also Parnas, Bovet, & Zahavi, 2002, who describe it as “an excessive tendency to monitor, and thereby objectify, one’s own experiences and actions.”) Podvoll says (1990, p. 156): “Everything in mind is multiplying: cloning, branching off into endless varieties of itself, never tiring, producing a jungle of new species of thoughts, an insatiable evolution, filling the whole world.” In psychopathology the combination of perplexity and hyperreflexivity is mostly considered as ‘disturbed’ experience (note terms like ‘exaggerated’ and ‘excessive’ in the definitions), because it often leads to unwanted and maladjusted behavior. In psychiatric practice, hyperreflexivity is not seldom described as a slowing down, or even breaking down—instead of a speeding up—of thought and consciousness. On the outside the stream, or ‘whirlpool’ of consciousness seems merely incoherent, fragmented, or crushed, whereas from the inside, instead, everything may seem more intense, more connected, and appearing in a higher, mysterious form of coherence. Although the madman may experience himself as light years away, far beyond everyday concerns, others may conceive him as lagging behind, unable to keep pace.

In a philosophical mode we may relate perplexity and (deliberate forms of) hyperreflexivity to the basis of philosophy itself, namely amazement and reflection. Madness as composition of

perplexity and hyperreflexivity are then to be considered as ‘proto-philosophy,’ spurred by the same, although more intense, impulses as common philosophy. In this context it must be noted what the psychopathologist Van den Bosch (1990, p. 112) states: “Some patients are preoccupied by mystic-religious, sectarian or pseudo-scientific views.” When we analyze such ‘preoccupations’ more closely, we can distinguish three (linguistic) domains, forms, or levels of expression into which the proto-philosophy of madness is condensed.

First is the domain of natural language. Everyone has language at his disposal, and the madman also uses language to articulate his experiences, to say ‘what is happening.’ In his mad language, personal backgrounds resonate and these are an important factor and point of access into the experience of the mad person himself. But there is more to mad language: with the help of ordinary means—of ordinary language—it is attempted with full effort to express, make sense of, and refer to something extraordinary of high importance. Thereby, ordinary language explodes, from its deep semantic cores and structures to its surface forms, discourse conventions, phonetics, and intonation. It changes into an endless ethereal game of transformations and mirrorings of signifiers and signifieds across languages, in which peculiar shifts of metaphorization and demetaphorization and vague allusions of seemingly cosmic connections catch the eye and ear. This has pejoratively been called ‘word salad,’ although the most appealing forms may be called hermetic poetry. For example, the madman Pfersdorff wrote (cited in Vogelaar, 1983): “Basius Cheesehead bonjour, choclatté, do not be afraid I am down. I was shot down in the Browmather Street by mister Brown, directly thought through line, para, comma, Germany Berlin Paris in a circle ensemble, marble is smelly cheese, brown hair is red against, greenor, inspector blessed the Pope up own Lee.”

Second, a frequent level of expression for psychotic proto-philosophy is the special domain of discourse and practices of mysticism, religion, and spirituality. It is no wonder that, to do justice to one’s extraordinary experiences, manners of phrasing and acting are used from a domain that is known to deal with extraordinary phe-

nomena—questions and problems about life and death, good and evil. And it is also no wonder that terms like ‘revelation,’ ‘enlightenment,’ ‘rebirth,’ ‘apocalypse,’ and so on, are found so frequent in reports from mad experiences. The avoidance of religiously tainted language in psychiatry has not been followed up by any more sensible method or discourse that could guide psychotic proto-philosophy toward viable inter-subjectively meaningful narratives. The madman with his meaningful experiences jumps all too often out of the frying pan of God delusions into the fire of medical illness discourse. Charles Taylor remarks in his *A Secular Age*:

Casting of religion was meant to free us, give us our full dignity of agents; throwing off the tutelage of religion, hence of the church, hence of the clergy. But now we are forced to go to new experts, therapists, doctors, who exercise the kind of control that is appropriate over blind and compulsive mechanisms; who may even be administering drugs to us. Our sick selves are even more being talked down to, just treated as things, than were the faithful of yore in the churches. (Taylor, 2007, p. 620)

#### FROM A MIRROR POINT OF CONVERGENCE

A third domain of expression for proto-philosophy is philosophy. In principle, there is no appropriate language or philosophical approach that could adequately express and describe the domain of madness, because it concerns a realm that lies both beyond and before the differentiation between language and thought. Madness concerns a philosophical level where it is undecided yet whether a proposition concerns experience ‘as someone’ or reflection ‘about something’; whether a proposition refers to appearances or interpretations of something loosely called reality; whether propositions depict something given or create something new. However, in the cases where messages from this realm do reach us in a vaguely understandable way, most probable philosophical frames of reference that come to mind are those that revolve around these very same complexities, and which lie closely to the problems and themes of mysticism, spirituality and religion. It concerns kinds of philosophy that are narrowly related to the moment of amazement—and perplexity—and

that have not been too far involved or elaborated in discourse or tradition proper.

Out of mad proto-philosophical origins we witness the emergence of free-floating cosmologies, all-encompassing systems and textual reveries. Common to these is, first of all, the tendency toward monism. The way to and through madness is characterized by transgressive thought; an inclination to contain everything in a monolithic flow that exceeds all oppositions, leaving nothing alone or untouched in a stability of a supposed otherness. In practice this mad monism may implicate fantasies and postulations of a ‘monarch,’ a ‘core force’ or a ‘Plotinian One’ in the deepest of thought, around which paranoid circles of meaning revolve.

Second, philosophies stemming from madness are often colored in an ‘idealist’ way. The breakthrough of deliberate hyperreflexivity into the domains of perplexity implies and concurs with an emanating of the mind or spirit toward reality, an establishing of real contact between and within thought and the underlying matrix of reality. Accompanying concrete mad experiences are feelings and thoughts of telepathy and telekinesis.<sup>3</sup>

Third, owing to the appearance of ‘real contact,’ the contacted instance—whether it be a force, a light or darkness, a ghost or God—obtrudes more forcefully. Limits disappear, distances vanish, and it is as if delineated ‘essences’ burst out and free-swirling ‘existences’ escape. These feelings of connection, flowing, and intensity lead to philosophies of affirmation and fullness. Terms from psychopathology that are used in these contexts are mania, derailment, and disinhibition.

Fourth, in addition to the fullness of the flow, often sooner or later the purposelessness and elusiveness of the flow is experienced, and one stumbles into the total emptiness of essential instability and nothingness. Nothing endures in the mad domain, no stable words or concepts, no firm ground is found in that psychotic proto-philosophical vanishing point of convergence. Mad hyperreflexivity does not lead to the discovery or creation of a stable, safe new world, but merely to an unstable, solitary, rapidly fluctuating symbolism. Psychopathological notions most reminiscent of this aspect are depressive psychosis, anxiety and emptiness.



Finally, after the initial phases of compact and hermetic perplexity, after the oscillating raptures and anxieties, contractions and expansions, longer para-reflective elaborations and systems may begin to emerge. In these new mad constructions that spring forward from psychotic proto-philosophy, oppositions and dualisms of nothing and being, fullness and emptiness, inside and outside, life and death, finiteness and infinity, past and present are interwoven in idiosyncratic, unparalleled ways (cf. Custance [1954]; Schreber [1903]), or in philosophically more deliberate ways—as in Schelling’s *Ages of the world*. In his monograph *Schelling* (1955), Jaspers discusses extensively how Schelling, again and again, attempts to bring the philosophical amazement to a head, to catch it in words, in discursive reasoning and systems, in which he balances on the edge of—at least textual—madness. Jaspers says in his introduction (1955, p. 9): “I studied him with amazement about how such great impulses so easily got caught in madness. Through Schelling I came to understand more clearly what philosophy is, and at the same time I saw its wrong tracks. But who has ever been engaged in philosophy without finding truth in madness?”

## CONCLUSION

I have shown in this article how philosophy can be related to madness. First, there already exists a tradition in which philosophy is applied to madness, namely phenomenological psychiatry. With further input from philosophy this tradition may continue and grow in relevance and applicability, not only for psychiatric practice, but it may contribute to a widening and extension of philosophical anthropology. Second, with the help of some biographical, autobiographical, and phenomenological considerations, I argued that the activity of philosophizing has some fundamental and intrinsic connections with the process of madness. Third, I have tried to turn around the usual (self-) framings of psychotic discourse that usually only lead to (self-) reifications in psychiatric labels and stigmas, and I have argued for more attention to philosophical and other extraordinary movements of thought that are found in there.

Especially with respect to the third conclusion, further research may be valuable. In what ways can mad thought and experience contribute to conceptions about the limits and delimitations of man and humanity, and in what way can two-way traffic between madness and philosophy be promoted? In addition, this research can be placed in a broader context of ‘transformative philosophy,’ in a tradition that may have begun with pre-Socratics like Empedocles and Parmenides and that have continued to our present age with thinkers like Pierre Hadot (1995), Michel Foucault, and Peter Kingsley (2003). At stake here are philosophical turns, spiritual transformations, religious conversions, drug-induced breaks (e.g., by ayahuasca, mescaline, or LSD), and psychotic and mystic episodes and other kinds of changes, both as options for the producers as well as for the consumers of philosophical texts. For research into a possible ‘radical turn in the natural attitude to life,’ madness provides an excellent opportunity.

## NOTES

1. One reviewer doubted whether it is always the case that retention and protention remain intact during psychosis. That claim in my text is from a quote that serves as data for the discussion. But when brought into the discussion itself, I just want to note that this is an utterly complex question, that may put the whole Husserlian framework on temporality into question.

2. In this article, I try to problematize the distinction between philosophy and madness as it is usually presupposed and taken for granted and I do not distinguish beforehand between the philosophical sense of insight and the mad delusion of insight. But although I allude to a correspondence between the two—or at least, a family resemblance—I do not want to imply that there is some kind of privileged access to propositional knowledge by either one of the senses of ‘insight.’ For further discussion of differences and similarities between philosophical and mad insights, see the interesting counterpart and elaboration of the notion of ‘intellectual intuition’ in German Idealism of Hegel and Schelling, and compare also the well-known remarks by William James concerning the ‘noetic quality’ of mystic experiences (see James, 1902, p. 367).

3. See also Sass’ (1994) analyses of the Wittgensteinian and Schreberian puzzlements and ponderings about subjectivism, solipsism and ‘being the center of your own experience.’

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